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LEARNING TO  
HAVE FAITH

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LEARNING TO HAVE FAITH

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I

## *Your Need for Faith*

"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

—MARK 9:24

"What is the use of religious faith anyway?"

Three college students walked up after Harry Emerson Fosdick spoke on their campus, and that is what they asked him. It is a good question, and it ought to be answered.

It is a good question because it begins at the beginning. It takes nothing for granted. It has the ring of honesty about it. And it ought to be answered because there's a notion about that faith is pleasant to live with but not impossible to live without—that it is an elective in the university of experience. This is a deluded notion. Faith is a requirement if there ever was one. Faith is an essential ingredient for making any kind of practical success of the business of living. Consider, then, your need of faith.

I

For one thing, we need a religious faith because we must have a satisfactory interpretation of ultimate facts. There is a high-sounding phrase which we roll glibly off our tongues, often without stopping to think what it means. We speak of our philosophy of life. Our philosophy of life is nothing but

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the interpretation which we place upon certain inescapable facts to give them meaning.

For example, take the fact of life. Here it is. We have it on our hands, all of us. What does it mean? You get up in the morning and go to your office and work hard and come home tired; and what is there for tomorrow, and all the rest of your tomorrows, but the same old thing? You get married and set up a home, and your children come, and for a while you find some fascination in playing with them on your knee; but before you know it they have grown up and gone out into the world to take over the same round of duties which wearies you. You make yourself a slave to your job to make money, and then a depression or a time of inflation takes it from you; or if you can keep it you learn in the end that gold is cold and hard and holds little satisfaction for the soul. Or you grow tired of your work and set out to seek pleasure and become miserable trying to have a good time. What does it mean—or does it have any meaning?

And then our question is set in sharper focus when the telephone rings and the message comes that your friend has died and you go to visit the family. Here is a fact which you must face. What do you believe about it? What meaning do you place upon it? Has this man who has met death reached journey's end? Or is his life a continued story, with another chapter yet to be written about living happily ever after? What an experience like that does to you depends upon what you believe about it, and what you believe is your faith.

Or take the fact of history in whose stream each of us is caught. What do you believe about it? Is the march of time going anywhere worth going, or will it get lost in the dark? Sometimes the darkness grows so intense that it makes a man throw in the sponge. But what if your creed has an article about divine purpose like that of the seer of Patmos who saw

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the beast bound in chains and cast into the pit, while on the throne sat the eternal God?

One day Thomas Carlyle met Bishop Wilberforce on one of the streets in London, and they fell to talking as they walked. Carlyle asked the bishop if he had a creed, and he replied that he had.

"But," he went on, "what bothers me is that it gets on so slowly in the world."

"Do you mean," asked his companion, "that it bothers you to have to wait so long to see what you believe about the world come true?"

"Exactly," replied the bishop.

"Well," said Carlyle, "that may be true, but if you've got a creed you can afford to wait."

I like the way Studdert-Kennedy puts things. He writes a book about faith and titles his first chapter "Bread and Butter." He says that most of us have been trying to live on "fancy cakes—little bits of God-knows-what with cherries on top—pure sensations without satisfaction." And that's the reason we are fed up, still hungry but can't eat. Are you fed up with yourself, with other people, with your world? What you need is bread and butter, solid food—some belief about life, here and hereafter, and about the world in which we live; some belief that will put meaning into these things and set your feet to walking with a sense of purpose. What you need, in brief, is a faith.

## II

Take a second step into our truth and note that a faith is needful not only in telling us what to think about life but what to do about it. Each of us faces the necessity of going on living and we require a road map to go by. Our belief forms the pattern of our behavior, and to meaning it adds morals.

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Emerson puts our truth on this wise: "A man's deeds," he says, "are but the picture book of his creed."

Chesterton remarks that if he were a young man looking for a room to rent he would ask his prospective landlady not, "What are your rates?" but "What is your view of the universe?" If she is right there, she will be right in her rates.

A story is told of a minister who wanted a real vacation, so he got the captain of a fishing boat to take him along so he could be alone with those honest fishermen. One day he thought he would talk to this rough fishing captain about religion.

"To what denomination do you belong?" he asked.

"Well," said the captain, "all my folks are Baptists, so I guess I lean that way."

And then to the minister's surprise the fisherman took the initiative.

"And what is your denomination?" he asked.

The minister gave the name of his denomination—a church which prides itself on a minimum of theology—and then added: "But I don't suppose you ever heard of that church."

"Oh, yes," said the fisherman, "I know what your church is. You don't believe a thing on Sunday, and you live up to it every day in the week."

That fishing captain put the word in a nutshell for us. You see, then, the stupidity of saying, as so many of us do, that you can believe as you like, it's doing right that matters. Well, did it make no difference what a man named Hitler believed? It was nothing more nor less than Hitler's creed which threw a monkey wrench into history, and it made such a big difference that it involved directly the lives of ten million of our citizens.

And right here you see the inadequacy of saying, "My

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creed is the Golden Rule. I believe in doing unto others as I would be done by. That's enough for me." The alcoholic who buys his friend a drink and makes him like himself is doing unto others as he would they should do unto him. He is acting out the Golden Rule exactly. Only if you say first of all, "I believe in taking my cue from Christ"—only then is it safe to say, "I believe in living by the Golden Rule." The Golden Rule is far from golden unless you have a creed to guide you. Right conscience with a wrong creed will only turn us into a herd of swine helping each other to wallow in the mud.

It is important then, if you are employing a man to work for you, to know what his faith is. If he believes that honesty is not only the best policy but also a bedrock principle to be followed at all costs, then you can know that your cash register is safe when you turn your back. But if he believes that taking money is all right as long as he doesn't get caught, you will never spend an easy night's rest. If you are a young woman preparing to marry a certain man, it is important to know what his faith is. If he believes that marriage is a life-long affair, that chastity before and fidelity afterward is a rule never to be broken, then you are entitled to peace of mind as you walk with him to the altar. But if his faith is nothing more than the Golden Rule, if he believes in doing unto you as he wishes you might do unto him—give him his freedom that he might follow his fancy in another direction—then the future of your marriage is something less than secure.

Your faith is what you believe, and what you believe is what you live by. Because you must go on living, you can never outlive your need of faith.

### III

Take a third step into our truth and note that we need a religious faith, not only because we must have an interpretation of ultimate facts and a guide for conduct, but also because there are times when we need to fall back upon a

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strength stronger than our own. The sign over the public service company says, "Light and Power." That is what we need: light on the mystery of life, and power for the mastery of life. And that is what our faith can give us: not only light, but power.

One day a member of the church called me to the hospital. "It's my wife," he said, "and it was all so sudden. They brought her here, and the doctor has told me that it is touch and go for her life. If she doesn't pull through, I don't think I can take it. So I've called you to ask if there is any help I can get from my religion at a time like this."

Suppose I had said to him, "My friend, that's easy. All you need do is to reach right in here close to your heart—or wherever it is that you keep the thing you call your soul—and twist it until it comes out. Then walk over to the wall and take the electric bulb out of the socket. Put your soul into the socket and screw it in tight. Then walk over to the switch and push the button, and you will get all the power that the electric company has to give."

He would have looked at me and said, "You are a fool." And he would have been correct. You see, there is a kind of power which it is not the business of the electric company to supply. It is the power which comes from an interior source of spiritual comradeship.

Too often we are tempted to leave that out of account. Franz Werfel reminds us that we are so much preoccupied these days with Left and Right that we have forgotten that there is an Above and Below. Living so constantly on the Horizontal and forgetting the Vertical we are forced to try to make the grade under our own steam, and it plays out on us. Here is a doctor who says to his minister, "I meet so many distressed patients who are without any anchorage." Here is a character in a novel who says to a friend: "I'm not an eight-day clock. I run down within the twenty-four hours. Wind me up, won't you please?" And here is a man who said to

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me out of the wreckage that was his life: "I just ran out of gas—that's all there is to it."

After talking with a man like that you turn to the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, and you see what faith can do to put heart into people. Here is no pitiful lack of anchorage! Here is no one begging to be wound up! Here is no running out of gas! Listen:

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac. . . . By faith Moses [chose] rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin. . . . By faith they passed through the Red Sea. . . . And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

Courage, they say, is the ability to hold on one minute longer; but it is faith which ties the knot and gives you something to hold on with.

Russell Ditzén of New York tells about a friend of his who had lost a business that took thirty years to build.

All he was able to save was his home. Club memberships and all the gracious amenities of living had to go by the boards. Approaching sixty years of age, that man, after long and humbling months, made a new connection and is now going full tilt, with the happy energy which is his hallmark. In a chance conversation he mentioned reading the Bible the evening before. On inquiry he said, "For more years than I want to report, I've read at least a chapter of the Bible every night before going to bed. I had a little difficulty some time back and I started my reading of the evening with the verses:

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The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

My help cometh from the Lord.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

He recited those words from memory and then continued, "Those verses and the trust I had built in myself over a period of years by Bible reading kept me from going off the deep end. . . . The Bible literally saved my life by giving me a faith in God which really carried me through."<sup>1</sup>

In the light of an experience like this the question with which we began sounds childishly out of place. The real question is not, What is the use of religious faith? but rather, Do I have a faith in God which can save my life when the time comes that I shall need it?

Do you?

<sup>1</sup> From *Personal Security Through Faith* by Dr. Lowell Russell Ditzén. Copyright, 1954, by Henry Holt and Company, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

## II

# *Learning to Have Faith*

“Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.”

—JOHN 1:46

“How do you get faith?” Not long ago a young man asked me that. “Well,” I replied, “that’s an interesting question. Tell me more of what you mean by it.”

“Take the Communists, for example,” he went on. “They have a creed and they tell their people what to believe, and they have to take it or else. But it’s different with us. We can believe or not, as we choose. Some of the things you talk about I would like to believe, but how do you go about getting faith?”

I thought immediately of a man named Philip in the New Testament. He had come to believe something which he considered worth while. He went to tell his friend Nathanael about it, and Nathanael said, “Oh, yeah! You’re all wet. How can this thing be?” So Philip answered him in three little words —“Come and see.”

Down this road are to be found the answers to some of the thorniest questions of our Christian faith. Now we want to make that pilgrimage.

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### I

Take, first of all, the question of faith in the goodness of God. It is no easy thing to believe that God is good. When Philip came to Nathanael with the report that the Messiah of Israel, the one long looked for and longed for, had come at last, and that he was this Son of a carpenter in Nazareth, Nathanael was dumfounded. Nazareth had a reputation in Palestine that was none too good. When Nathanael put his question to Philip, he was quoting a proverb: Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? The man who thinks asks this same question about the goodness of God. Nazareth extends its boundaries and covers the map of the world, and the thinking man puts this question: Can any good God come out of this Nazareth scheme of things?

Sit down with such a man and seek to answer his question on the basis of thought alone, and see how far you get. For every argument you can bring forward in favor of your point, he can offer another just as good against it. Talk all you will about good things like sunshine and saints and little children, and he will come right back at you with things like snakes and storms and wars. If he knows his business and you are not on your guard, he will come close to doing for you what the toad did for the centipede.

The centipede was happy quite  
Until a toad in fun  
Said, "Pray, which leg goes after which?"  
That worked her mind to such a pitch,  
She lay distracted in a ditch,  
Considering how to run.

But suppose you say instead to your man: My friend, faith in God is not something which can be settled by argument alone. Faith is the response of your total self to a way of be-

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lieving. Your self, like Gaul, is divided into three parts: mind and heart and will. When you seek to argue yourself into faith, you are responding with only one third of your personality, your mind. But if you will take what Jesus says about God and then go out and bet your life it is true, making the grand gamble with mind and heart and will, you will find coming to meet you such a person as Jesus described God as being. Life will then begin to work better on that basis than it has ever worked before.

What can a man who has never matriculated know about college life? What can a man who has never been in the water know about swimming? What can a man who has never taken a wife know about marriage? What can a man who has never gone out with God know about faith? No quest, no conquest. No experiment, no experience.

Studdert-Kennedy has described for us the moment when real religion was born with him. He was alone at night on a moor beside the sea. Above him was the great black dome of heaven and a million stars. There was no sound but the boom of the waves against the cliffs. He was alone; and yet he was acutely conscious of a great, vast, mysterious Presence—the spirit of the universe moving there in the dark. He felt that night as he was to feel on a later occasion when he lay by himself in no man's land between the trenches and watched a moving figure coming toward him, not knowing whether it were friend or foe. Suppose he whispered, "Who goes there?" Would the answer be a bullet, a friendly word, or silence? Just so had he felt on this night on the moor beside the sea. Suppose he cried out to this mysterious spirit of the universe, "Who goes there?" Would there be any answer, or would there be nothing but the boom of the waves against the cliff? He decided to risk it. He made his cry. "Who goes there." In that moment his soul received an answer, and the answer was one word: *God*.

Just so does faith demand that risk, that gamble, that ad-

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venture. Someone said concerning Christopher Columbus that when he started out, he did not know where he was going; and when he arrived, he did not know where he was; and when he returned, he did not know where he had been—but all the same he discovered America. It is just as true of us as it was of him: no exploration, no discovery.

I say that some of us have found a God who is good. You say, "Can any good God come out of this Nazareth of a world?" And I say, "Come and see." This is the only way you will ever know.

## II

Down this road lies also, in the second place, the answer to the question of a changed life. A preacher stands in the pulpit and talks about the new birth, about conversion, about a transforming power which can change a life which knows itself to be weak and bad into a life that is good, saying, "We have found the secret." And you look at the thing you have on your hands, the thing called life, the thing that makes promises only to break them, the thing that intends to be better but which, when cornered by temptation, always gives in and feels ashamed because of it. And you say, "Can any good thing come out of this Nazareth of human clay?"

Try to settle that question by argument alone, and you will be up against a brick wall. A Moslem proverb has it: "If thou hearest that a mountain has moved, believe it; but if you hearest that a man has changed his character, do not believe it." Can a leopard change his spots? Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Can you make a silk purse out of a sow's ear? Can a man be born again, converted, changed, so that the old life that was, is no more and a new life comes into being? Is not the wisdom of the race, enshrined in its proverbs, all against it? The only answer possible is the answer which Philip made to the incredulity of Nathanael: "Come and see!"

When Louis Pasteur proposed his hypothesis that disease

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is caused by a germ and that inoculation with an antitoxin would kill the germ and cure the disease, the doctors of his day laughed at him. Suppose he had accepted their doubts. Suppose he had settled the matter by argument. Suppose he had been persuaded not to try his experiment. But he said to his doubters, Come and see! and so today we drink our pasteurized milk.

Whenever a man is honest and earnest enough to make the experiment, to put this truth to the test, he will find his way to faith in the fact of a new life. So Leo Tolstoi put it on this wise: "Five years ago I came to believe in Christ and my life suddenly became changed. I ceased desiring what I had wished before, and began to desire what I had not wished before. The direction of my life, my desires, suddenly became different: what was good and bad changed places."

Thomas Carlyle puts it down in one, two fashion: "You cannot understand a person unless you do two things: surrender to that person and then identify yourself with him, or you know nothing about him." Just so! Sit down and do nothing but argue about it, and you will never know the secret of this faith. But get up and step out upon it. Surrender to this Man of Galilee and identify yourself with him. As you know him, you will know, too, the power that transforms. Listen to one man whose name you know and who speaks out of his own experience. "If any man be in Christ"—surrendered to him and under his control—"he is a new creature." His life is changed.

To bring it down to where you live, ask yourself this question: If Christ were sitting with me at my desk at the office, in the locker room at the club, in the hotel room in New York, could I be anything less than my best? You could not to save your life. As long as you are in his presence and under his control, it is easier to change and be your best than not to be.

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Paracelsus, in the Browning poem, asks Festus if there are not two moments in a pearl diver's life:

One—when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,  
One—when, a prince, he rises with his pearl?  
Festus, I plunge!

You've got to take that plunge; and when you do, you will rise with the pearl of great price.

### III

Move on now and notice, in the third place, that there is a question more fundamental than either of the two we have considered. I can imagine one of you saying something like this: "That is the trouble with you; you take too much for granted. You are asking me to settle my question about the goodness of God on the basis of what Jesus said about him. You are suggesting that I find the answer to the problem of a changed life by surrendering to him. But I have not come so far along in my faith as your starting point. I must begin further back. I must go back to Jesus himself, and my question is this: How can I know that he is any more than any other man, that he has a right to be called the Son of God?"

Well, of course, that is right—where Nathanael was. Philip came and said to him: "Man, we have found our Man—the one Moses told about, the one the prophets preached about, the One we've been looking for. He is Jesus, the son of Joseph, Jesus of Nazareth."

Nathanael is amazed. "Nazareth?" he says, "Nazareth? Come on, now, Philip. Surely you are not so stupid as to believe that. Everybody knows you are a gullible sort, always ready to believe anything anybody tells you; but I didn't think you would fall for that sort of thing. You know better than that. You live in Bethsaida. You know what folks say about Nazareth. It's the jumping-off-place. It's the last place in

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the world to look for anything worth while. Its degradation is proverbial. Really, Philip, do you think any good thing can come out of Nazareth?"

Philip's word to him was this: "Come and see."

And this is all I am asking you to do. I do not ask you to believe that Jesus is the Son of God simply because I say so. I do not ask you to believe it because he said so. I do not ask you to believe it because the Bible says so. I am not asking you to believe anything to start with. I am simply asking that you be honest and in earnest and willing to make an experiment. I am simply asking that you "come and see."

It is worthy of noting here that this was all our Lord himself asked of men. He began by picking out twelve men "that they might be with him." One day he found two fishermen working on their nets, and he said to them, I want you to be my friends. He saw another man named Matthew sitting at his desk collecting taxes, and he gave him the nod. Finally, there were twelve of them. He did not say anything for a long time about being anything more than a carpenter. As a matter of fact, he appears to have been careful not to say anything. It was at least two years after they had lived together in the closest companionship till he mentioned it. Then one day he took them aside and said to them, What do you think about me? And Simon Peter was the first to speak: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

These twelve took nothing for granted. They followed this Teacher from Nazareth simply because they liked his looks. They began by thinking of him as a man like themselves. It was only after they had lived and worked with him that they decided there was something about him that was different.

And so I do not ask you to take anything for granted. I simply ask that you be honest and in earnest and willing to make an experiment. I simply ask that you be willing to spend some time with him; that you take the New Testament and walk up and down its pages with him; that you invite him

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to step out from its covers and be your guest for a while; that you take him with you in your thoughts and ask his opinion when you make your decisions.

Some of us have made this experiment. We say to you, "My friend, we have found our Man. He seems to know his way around in this old world better than anybody else we have ever known. He has the last word—and it's a good word—about life and duty and destiny. He has put us on the right track about things, and now we find life more satisfying than it has ever been before. He has helped us to see that the universe is good and made us want to be a part of that goodness. He has a word of pardon for a bad conscience, a word of peace for a troubled mind, a word of power for a weak will. All in all, he is just about the finest thing that can happen to you, and he is this Carpenter from Nazareth."

"Nazareth?" you say. "But Nazareth is such a mean little place. Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

And there is only one honest answer we can make to your honest question: "Come and see!"

Will you?

### III

## *Faith That Looks Up*

“Look unto me, and be ye saved.”

—ISAIAH 45:22

This verse from Isaiah is a word of God spoken to the people of Israel while they are captives in Babylon. In this foreign city wooden idols like Bel and Nebo are borne about on the backs of animals. The people are tempted to leave the worship of the true God and go astray after the idols. So the prophet points out the contrast.

Here is an idol, which has to be carried and has become a burden on the back of the weary beast. On the other hand, here is the true God, who carries instead of having to be carried. It is a difference we all know—the difference between a load and a lift! And then Isaiah hears the voice of God saying: “They have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save.” It is pure stupidity to follow after a piece of carved and painted wood. Instead, “Look unto *me*, and be ye saved!”

The one word in the text which gets my attention is the word “look.” The more you think about it, the more it turns out to be the road to faith.

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### I

Let us get into our truth by noting, first of all, that your life is determined by what you look at.

A friend told me how he learned that fact while visiting one of the art galleries in Athens. He was in a room with a marble statue of an athlete. As the tourists walked in to see the statue, he noticed their sunken chests come out and their stooped shoulders go back. It is an experiment which you can try yourself sometime. While standing around in a group at a reception, straighten yourself up and stand with an erect posture, and the persons with whom you are talking will do the same.

For the same reason you will always play a better game of golf when playing with someone who is a better player than you are. Standing on the tee, you will watch your companion swing. If there is a fault in his swing, you will find yourself repeating that fault. But if his swing is in the groove, it will begin to pull your swing into the groove. Altogether unconsciously you will give evidence of the law that we become like what we look at.

Nathaniel Hawthorne has put this law for us into a classic piece of literature called "The Great Stone Face." You recall the story. It tells about a mountain with the figure of a face which looked out over a village. The legend was that one day a man would appear who looked like the face on the mountain. Long years the townspeople waited, while a lad who lived in the village looked up at the face and wondered when the man would come. At length he himself, who had spent his life looking at the face, was seen to be that man.

It is this fact which gives significance to the main idea in a book which many are reading, *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale. A thought is something which flashes a picture on the screen of your mind and gives you something to look at with your inner eye. If you think

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negative thoughts—that is, if you look at a picture of yourself as inadequate or inferior or ill—you will become that kind of person. But if you look at a picture of yourself as being, with the help of God, strong in spirit and healthy in body, you will become that kind of person.

Wherever you turn—whether to people standing before a statue, or a golfer making his swing, or an ancient prophet preaching a sermon—you are impressed by the importance of the simple business of looking. For we become like what we look at.

## II

Move on and notice, in the second place, that we have here a cue as to how to go about our main business. Whether you call it building character or growing in goodness or being a Christian, it all comes out the same thing in the end. How can I go about being the kind of person my conscience tells me I ought to be?

There are two answers to this question. The first is to draw up a set of rules and then try hard to live up to them. This is the method men used in the Old Testament. They were given the Law, and the Law consisted of 613 rules which told you the things you must do and the things you must not do. It was a job in itself to memorize these 613 rules, and then it was a bigger job to obey them. Obedience was to be had only by trying hard, by continually rounding up a wayward will and flogging it into submission.

Most of us go through a stage when this is what the Christian life means to us. It is a set of rules to be obeyed. We must be honest, whether we want to or not. We must be clean in all we think and say and do, whether we feel like it or not. We must be kind, whether or not it is our nature. We must be forgiving, when all the time we would much rather find satisfaction in hating and getting even.

For a while we have the feeling that what God wants and

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what we want are just the opposite. Our conscience tells us we ought to try to follow his lead, and we try and try and try. After failing and feeling shamed for it, and trying again and failing, we feel so sick and tired of trying that we begin to wish we had never heard of God and of this business of being a Christian. We are almost ready to throw the whole thing overboard and float with the current.

If this is the way you are feeling now, then there is good news for you. There is a second answer to that question. While the Old Testament is full of rules which men were given to obey in order to be good, the New Testament is full of a Person who is goodness itself.

You have discovered, I am sure, what that means. In the presence of some persons you are less than your best self. They just seem to call out the worst stories you know; and before you know it, you are saying mean things about other people. But there are other persons in whose presence these things never happen. They call out the best that's in you; and while you are with them, it is easier to be your best than to be otherwise. The name that stands at the top of this list of persons is the Name that is above every name. When you are in his presence, you don't have to try to be good; because you couldn't be anything else if you tried.

The first time I came in sight of this truth was when hearing a sermon which Harry Emerson Fosdick delivered over the radio. The very topic of the sermon was worth its weight in gold. It was called "Being Good Without Trying,"<sup>1</sup> and the text came from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians: "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image." The preacher pointed out that it doesn't say we change ourselves, or that we become good by trying. What it says is that we *are* changed, and the power that does it is the power of a look.

<sup>1</sup> This sermon is included in Dr. Fosdick's *The Hope of the World*, p. 204.

## FAITH THAT LOOKS UP

For, Paul says, if you look into a mirror and see there the face of Christ, and keep on looking, you will find yourself being changed so that more and more you will become like the person at whom you are looking.

The students of human nature have drawn this fact up into a law for us. We constantly suppose that the strongest power we have is will power, and that if we accomplish anything it is by exertion of the power of will. But these wise men say, No; imagination, which is the power of your mind to make a picture and give you something to look at, is much more powerful. So much so that they give us this principle: whenever the will and the imagination conflict, the imagination inevitably gains the day. The proof of this fact they give in this picture: put a ten-inch plank down on the floor and you can walk it from end to end without the least trouble. But raise that plank to the height of a ten-story building and you couldn't walk it to save your life. You would fall off. Why? Not because your will is any less strong up in the air; but because in your mind you would be looking at the image of yourself falling off, and your will would be powerless to keep you from falling.

So, then, if you are tired of trying to be good, stop trying and begin looking. Exercise your imagination instead of your will power. Every night when you go to bed, take time to close your eyes and have a look at the face of Christ. In the morning when you get up, close your eyes and have another look. Or, if you find it easier, get a good strong picture of him and hang it in your office or in your library at home, or both, and all through the day steal a glance at him. Like a businessman I know, get a smaller picture and carry it in your billfold. Let never a day go by without getting several good looks at him, and you will begin to tell the difference.

"Look unto me, and be ye saved," he says. And as long as you keep looking, you are not only saved but safe too.

## LEARNING TO HAVE FAITH

### III

There is only one more thing to be said, and it should be said to the man who has never yet found a faith in this Christ: If ever you get a good look at him and see him as he is, you can't turn him down to save your life.

Charles H. Spurgeon was a preacher in the last century who for thirty-five years spoke to millions of people in London, and his sermons are still read today. He has told the story of how he found this faith. When he was fifteen years old, he started out to church one Sunday morning. A heavy snow-storm prevented his going where he intended, and he stopped in a little Primitive Methodist church closer home. There were no more than a dozen present when eleven o'clock came, and the minister was not among them, so that they had some trouble deciding who should lead the service and preach the sermon. Finally one agreed to do it. Spurgeon describes him as "a poor, thin-looking man, a shoemaker or tailor, or something of that sort." This uneducated man climbed into the pulpit, and as his text he took: "Look unto me, and be ye saved."

He did not even pronounce the words rightly [Spurgeon goes on to tell], but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in the text, and I listened as though my life depended upon what I heard. In about ten minutes the preacher had got to the end of his tether. Then he saw me sitting under the gallery; and I daresay, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. He then said: "Young man, you look very miserable." Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance. However, it was a good blow, well struck. He continued: "And you will always be miserable—miserable in life, and miserable in death—if you do not obey my text. But if you will obey now, this moment, you will be saved." Then he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist can shout, "Young man, look to Jesus! Look, look, *look!*"

## FAITH THAT LOOKS UP

I did [Spurgeon says]; and, then and there, the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun! <sup>2</sup>

There is an old story of two hermits who visited the neighboring city. Its distractions caused them so to forget God that they spent the night in what seemed to them an unparalleled orgy of vice. As with eyes downcast and thoughts heavy and flat they turned their listless footsteps toward their accustomed place of solitude, each began to contemplate the situation.

One hermit let his wretched thoughts prey upon him. He hated his sin, but the shame of it entangled him so that he could not free himself. The feeling of guilt seemed to grow bigger and bigger as he dwelt upon it. His mind was so concentrated on these thoughts that it never reached God at all. He was quite unaware of the flood of God's love that understands and forgives and renews and inspires. For mile after mile he argued with himself, until it seemed impossible that he should be rehabilitated in his old decent and simple way of life. Suddenly he stopped, turned to his friend, and with his eyes full of misery told him good-by and went back to the city.

But the other hermit, thoroughly disgusted with himself, thought about the emptiness and unsatisfying nature of sin. His penitence was very real, and he said a prayer that went like this: "Father, I have sinned, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Thou knowest all my heart. Help me for Christ's sake never to forget thee again." In the silence that followed he knew that his prayer was heard. He felt strong inside, and he went on back home with a song in his heart.

As long as you turn your thoughts in and look at your weakness, you will be lost. But if you will listen to the prophet as he spoke to the people in Babylon, and to the Primitive Methodist as he spoke to Charles Spurgeon, and to the voice of

<sup>2</sup> From F. W. Boreham, *A Bunch of Everlastings*, pp. 146-47.

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God as he speaks to you, you can find the answer to your needs.

One day long ago I went to church; and while I don't remember anything about the sermon, I remember the prayer before the sermon. The man said this: "O Lord, blot me out, so that when the people look here they won't see me but only my Saviour." This is the way every true minister feels about this business. His wish is to point men to Another and to say to them, "Look, men. There he is: the Fairest among ten thousand, the One altogether lovely, the Saviour himself! Take a good look at him; and when you see him as he is, you will want to team up with him and go his way."

"Look unto me, and be ye saved," he says. If only I can get you to look at him and keep on looking, he will get you. And I hope that he will!

## IV

### *Faith in Christ*

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith.”

—COLOSSIANS 2:6-7

One day a boy went to church while his father stayed at home because he was sick. Afterward the father asked, “Son, what did the preacher preach about today?”

The lad thought a moment and then replied, “He didn’t say.”

So it is in many pulpits. As a boy I can remember hearing preachers stand up on Sunday and plead with their people to accept Christ, while I kept wondering when one would stop long enough to explain what he was asking us to accept. Because of this, I feel the obligation to put in as clear terms as possible the meaning of faith in Christ and how it can be achieved.

The Apostle gives us a verse handmade for that purpose in his Letter to the Colossians: “As ye therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith.” He uses the three names by which we know Christ best; and if you can even begin to sound the depths of these three names you will

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recognize what faith in Christ has meant to men for two thousand years, and can mean to you.

### I

Look first at that word "Christ." It is the English form of a Greek word which means "Messiah." It belongs to the person who throughout the Old Testament was expected to come from God. The Messiah was the anointed One, and the anointed One was the appointed One. For example, the president of the United States appoints an ambassador to Great Britain. If the British prime minister wants to know the official position of the United States on any point, he accepts the word of the ambassador above that of any other American who happens to be in London; because the ambassador carries the credentials. It is so with Christ. He is the officially accredited representative of heaven to earth, commissioned to declare the word and the will of God. If, therefore, I have questions for which I desire answers, then this is where to go to get the right answers. And I do have questions.

For example, one day the scholar F. W. H. Myers stood with a group of tourists before the Sphinx in Egypt. One of them spoke up and asked if he could put one question to the Sphinx and expect to get an answer, what that question would be. He had his reply on the tip of his tongue: "Is the universe friendly?"

This is something I want to know too. I see so much that goes against my wishes that it makes me wonder sometimes if I am living as a prisoner in enemy territory. And so I go to this Christ and say, "What about it? Is there a Heart at the heart of things?" And he comes right back: "You can bet your life there is! I have inside information on that question, and I tell you that this is our Father's world. Listen to your own heartbeat and then raise that to infinity and that is God." When I take him at his word and go out to "bet my life" he is right, then I find that faith coming true. I discover that the

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Power which pulses through this universe, making the sun to shine and the trees to grow and the flowers to blossom, is a Person; and that Person is a friend, on my side and desiring the best for me. Then my tortured spirit lies down to rest.

But I have another question: What is life all about? Is it growing up, getting married, having children, going to work, and coming home tired every night? Is it bridge parties and football games and business deals and "making a success"?

A professor said to his students, "Boys, you must play the game of life according to the rules." Then one student spoke up and said, "Yes, professor, but what if there are no goal posts?"

One poor lost soul said that his diary contained no other entry for days but the repetition of this tiresome routine: "Got up, washed, went to bed."

So I go to this Christ and put it to him: "Where are the goal posts? What is life all about?" And by way of answer he gives me a bit of his own autobiography: "I came . . . not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." Life, he says, is for doing the will of God! When I take this truth and begin to put it to work, both in the large areas like the choice of a vocation and in the smaller matters like day-by-day decisions, I find that it works! I find a deep sense of inner harmony which makes me know that he knows what he is talking about.

Then there is another question which somebody asks every day. I went by request once to meet a person I had never seen before. This person opened our conversation by saying this: "They tell me I'm dying and the end is not far off. What can you say about what is ahead for me?"

What would you have said? I quoted the words of this Christ: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go . . . I will come again, and receive you unto myself." I went on to say that to my mind death is but a door; and if we have known Christ as a friend on this side, he will be waiting on the other

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side, and we can trust ourselves with full confidence in his hands. And when I left, I found myself saying, "Thank you, God, for this Christ." For without him I would have been at a total loss to find an answer.

Do you also have questions like these? Do you know any better place to go to get your answers? To learn that there is One who knows the answers, and to come to know what these answers are like, makes you wonder if this word "Christ" alone is not reason enough to put your faith in him.

## II

But there is a second word. The verse from Colossians gives him another name. It calls him "Jesus." It was the name given him by heaven. The angel foretelling his birth said, "Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." Not only is he my Teacher; he is my Saviour, too. And I need a Saviour.

I need a Saviour who can save me from taking the wrong road. Someone was observing the other day how well our highways are marked. He said you can take a road map and get in your car and drive from North Carolina to California, finding your way through the maze of city streets and all across the continent, by means of the markers along the road. The situation is just the reverse in traveling the continent of character. Whereas the road signs are plain all the way from here to the state called California, they are far less plain than they used to be from here to the state called character. The old signposts of customs and traditions have been pulled down; and when you come to a fork in the road, it is hard to know which is the right road and which the wrong road.

What do you mean by saying that one thing is right and another thing is wrong? Well, that picture of the road map is about as good an answer as any. Suppose you get in your car, wanting to go to Birmingham, and you find yourself on the road to Charlotte instead. Before long you will discover you

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are on the wrong road. What does this mean? It means that if you keep on that road, you will never get where you want to go. The right road is the road that takes you where you want to go, and the wrong road is the road which will not take you where you want to go.

And the reason why so many of us feel lost, frustrated, traveling hard and getting nowhere, and, because of that, unhappy in our personal living, our family living, our business life, is that we are on the wrong road. We will never get where we want to go until we get on the right road, and the right road is right here. The life and teachings of this Jesus are the compass by means of which you can get your bearings. Whenever you come to a crossroads, take the way he points and you will always arrive at the place you are headed for.

But what happens when you think the way he points is too hard and deliberately choose the other way, and the time comes that you run off into the ditch and get the mud of a guilty conscience all over yourself and find yourself headed into a dead end? When you foul things up for yourself and your family, and are unable to sleep at night and to live with yourself in the day, can you count on any help from him then?

Once again the answer is right here in this name. For if you look closely enough, you can see this Saviour climbing up on a cross. And when the motor of your pride has been silenced by your stupidity and you grow quiet and begin to listen, then you hear a voice. It is a voice lifted in prayer; and it says, Father, forgive him, for he knew not what he was doing.

That gets you. He showed you the right way, and you turned him down, and now he is praying for your pardon, trying to find an excuse for you. When you begin to take in the whole thing—that it is just such doings as yours which put him there, yet in spite of it he is praying for you—then you get down on your knees and find yourself saying, "O God, I can't stand that. For his sake, forgive me, and I'll never be

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such a fool again." And your very prayer is its own answer. You begin to feel good inside again, for you see God take your sin and drop it into the depths of the sea, so that it is as if it had never been.

Then the strangest thing happens. Your conscience is clear again, but you feel weak inside and uncertain of yourself. You are wondering if you can make it from there on your own. You look, and there he his coming down off that cross. He acts as if he wants to get into your car. When you open the door, he says, "Let's go the rest of the way together. I want to be with you to the end." So you go back to the point where you lost the way, and get on the right road, and with him sitting beside you it is easier to stay on the right road.

This is what it means when you put your faith in Jesus the Saviour. He saves you from the wrong road by pointing out the right way; he saves you from your conscience when you get on the wrong road and run into a wreck; and he saves you from your own weakness by going with you along the right road.

### III

But the Apostle has another name for this Christ. He is not only Christ Jesus; he is Christ Jesus our *Lord*. And this last is the biggest name of all three for you and me. We can call him Christ, and we can call him Jesus, and let it go at that. But if we call him Lord and mean business, that will make a difference for the rest of time.

This word "Lord" is a big word, a strong word, a word that means power, authority, mastery. The Jew called Jehovah "Lord." The Roman citizen called the emperor "lord." The Greek slave called his master "lord." So everyone who calls Jesus "Lord" is putting into his hands the power which the emperor held over the citizen and the master over the slave and Jehovah over the Jew. It means in literal fact that you

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give him right of way in every question you have to decide, that you make him the dictator of your life.

When you put it this way, you see how far most of us are from being Christians. How many of us submit our decisions to the court of his judgment? As a young person facing the question of a lifework; as a husband and wife considering a parting of the ways; as a businessman facing a certain deal; as any one of us planning the spending of our money and the use of our leisure time; how many of us, face to face with these questions, submit them first of all to this court of appeals and say, "What would Jesus have me do?" I am afraid a lot of us have never formed the habit of bringing him into the picture at all. Yet we are not Christians even in intent until we can say in all these matters, "Lord, you call the signals, and I'll run the play your way."

Now if we look at the verse again from his viewpoint, we recognize what the Apostle is really trying to tell us. He is saying that such committal to the will of Christ as Lord is the key we have been looking for. Here is the secret of learning to have faith in Christ. "Walk ye in him," says Paul, and you will be "rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith." Our Lord himself laid down this principle. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." Faith comes by following.

Horace Bushnell was a young instructor at Yale University. He had been brought up in a Christian home, but his faith had slipped away from him simply by neglect; all of a sudden he realized that his world had gone dark and he wanted to believe. He has left for us the story of how he found his way back to his faith.

One day he was walking up and down in his room, and he found himself talking to himself.

Is there, then, no truth that I do believe? Yes, there is this one, now that I think of it: there is a distinction of right and

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wrong that I never doubted, and I see not how I can; I am even quite sure of it. . . . Have I, then, ever taken the principle of right for my life? . . . Have I ever thrown my life out on the principle to become all it requires of me? No, I have not, consciously I have not. Ah, then here is something for me to do! No matter what becomes of my questions—nothing ought to become of them if I cannot take a first principle so inevitably true and live in it. Here then, I will begin. If there is a God, as I rather hope there is, and very dimly believe, he is a right God. If I have lost him in wrong, perhaps I shall find him in right.<sup>1</sup>

Then he falls to his knees and prays to the dim God, dimly felt, confessing the dimness for honesty's sake, and asking for help that he may begin a right life.

You know the rest. That committal of life became a ladder on which he climbed out of doubt into faith, and he went on to become a herald of the gospel without a peer in the American pulpit.

Of course there is only one reason why anyone should feel justified in asking you to turn the direction of your life over to Another, and that is this: he has your welfare at heart, and his way is always the best way for you. Have you ever taken your cue from Christ and been sorry later? Have you ever failed to take your cue from him and not been sorry later? I set it down as my honest, considered conviction that if you will "walk in him," if you will submit your decisions to him and give his way right of way, you will forever thank your lucky stars that you did. This will be a red-letter day on your calendar if you can register this faith within yourself. Will you?

<sup>1</sup> Henry B. Wright, *The Will of God and a Man's Life Work*, p. 156.

# V

## *Faith in Prayer*

"One of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray. . . . And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven."

—LUKE 11:1-2

"I don't pray much," a farmer said, "but when I get in a bind, I do." You know his meaning. Whenever we get in a tight place, up against it, whenever the demands of any situation run beyond our ability to handle them, we lose no time in turning to God.

Does this experience make sense? Is it reasonable to suppose that when we call on God, he will hear our call and answer our need? The answer to that question depends altogether, of course, upon what we think of God.

It is important that we have a chart for prayer—a plan, a program, a blueprint, a technique. But there is one thing more important than a chart, and that is a charter, something which grants and guarantees the rights and privileges of prayer. Before you can have a form, you need a foundation. Prior to the blueprint is the basis. And so in the prayer that teaches us to pray, our Lord begins by saying: "Our Father." The moment you call God "Father," your charter is granted, and certain facts follow which help us to learn to have faith in prayer.

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### I

For one thing, the father-likeness of God encourages us to make prayer a natural part of our experience with him. If Jesus had said simply, "O God," it might not have been so; for it is possible to conceive a kind of God who is so remote and uncaring that prayer would be the last thing you would think of.

Dr. Clovis Chappell gives us a picture of what this means by telling of his experience as a youth who was broke in a strange city. "I did not have a penny," he said. "For a day I walked the streets hungry. I was in genuine need. But though I met hundreds of people, I asked none of them for help. This was the case, not because I needed nothing, but because all of them were strangers, and I feared that they would not care enough to help."<sup>1</sup>

But the moment you call God "Father," the picture changes. Then you are dealing not with a stranger, or a street filled with strangers, but with a Friend. Jesus takes a word spelled with a little "f," whose meaning we know, and uses that to give meaning to the word when it is spelled with a big "F." We know what fatherhood on the human level means. It means an individual interest in, and a loving concern for, each child. Jesus takes that fact and lifts it up and says that the same thing is true of God. And sometimes a man so catches the meaning of it that he can say, "God is a father who loves us each one as though there were but one of us to love."

But Jesus goes further to be sure that we mistake him not. To tell some people that God is like a father would not encourage them to seek him out in prayer. What we think of God as a father depends largely upon the content we have always given the word; and to some people father means not

<sup>1</sup> *Sermons on the Lord's Prayer*, p. 31. By permission of Abingdon Press. I am indebted to Dr. Chappell also for the following suggestion about the significance of "which art in heaven."

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a friend to be loved but a tyrant to be feared. And so Jesus goes further. He does not say simply, "Our Father," but "Our Father which art in heaven."

What does this mean? Well, we can be sure it is not what many of us think it means. We look upon heaven as a place, as a location. In the thought of Jesus it is a state, a condition of being. We might begin with our own idea and rise to that of Jesus'. When we think of heaven as a place, we think of it as a place of perfection. Take that adjective, then, which describes to us a place, and transfer it to the person with whom we are dealing, and what you have is this: "Our Father who art a perfect father"; "Our Father who art a father in the highest sense"; "Our Father who art always what a father should be." On a stone in a cemetery in Scotland someone wrote this epitaph: "He was —; he was what? Think what a man should be; he was that." By teaching us this prayer Jesus would have us say: God is—; God is what? Think what a father should be; he is that. "Our Father which art in heaven" means "Our Father who art a father to perfection."

And Jesus goes on a bit further in this same discourse to translate this fact into terms which state its meaning for prayer. "What man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask him for a loaf, will give him a stone; or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (A.S.V.).

During the Second World War a want ad appeared in the papers just before Christmas on this wise: "Wanted, a tricycle. Cost no consideration." Can't you see the picture? Here was a little child who wanted a tricycle. He had written Santa Claus for it; but Santa Claus was having a hard time of it, what with a war priority on steel. Yet Santa Claus was out to find it. He was willing to turn heaven and earth to get it, and I hope he succeeded. "Wanted, a tricycle. Cost no considera-

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*tion.*" And Jesus says, If you, with a love that will always remain imperfect in the light of the perfection of heaven, know how and want to give good gifts, how much more. . . .

Not until I can shut the door in the face of my own children. Not until I can tell them that they must never again ask me for another piece of chewing gum. Not until I can demand that they never climb upon my knee and put their arms around my neck and tell me that they love me. Not until then can I believe that prayer is an impertinence. Here, then, in this word "Father" I have a charter which guarantees a benevolence which bids me come before his throne to make my wants and wishes known.

## II

Go on to note, in the second place, that this charter makes plain the fact that God not only wants to answer prayer but that he can do so.

Some of us have lived through an experience which we would not care to have again. It was an experience in which a little knowledge had led us to think that God had turned the running of this world over to something called natural law. We looked out upon our world, and we saw things like the law of gravitation, the law of atmospheric pressure, the germ law of disease, the law of cause and effect. Unswerving regularity seemed to be the rule. Every movement of the earth and the planets was plotted for centuries to come, and we couldn't see any need for God to stick around and tell the sun every morning, "All right, get up and do it again."

The first time one comes to take natural law seriously—and we have to take it seriously—it has its effect on his belief in prayer. If there is a cause for every effect and an effect for every cause, then what room is there for prayer? If rain is the result of certain atmospheric conditions, what help will it be to pray for rain if those conditions do not exist? And if they do exist, what need is there to pray? If disease is caused by a

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germ, and a germ listens only to medicine, what help is it to pray when my child has the flu? It is such questions as these which the concept of natural law raises in the mind of the pray-er. It seems to handcuff God so that he is no longer God in the sense of being all-powerful but is simply a prisoner in his own universe, wanting to help often, but unable to lift his hand.

The truth that we need to go on to see is this: While laws cannot be repealed by prayer, they are only instruments in the hands of a person. They are not to be violated, but they may be used, manipulated, combined to serve his own ends.

For example, it is a law that water will not flow uphill, but still we go on putting bathrooms upstairs. It is a law that a heavy substance will not float upon a lighter one, but still we go on building ships that will sail the seas. It is a law that a wind blowing against a flat surface will push it in the direction in which the wind is blowing; but put a sailor who knows his business at the controls of a sailboat and by skillful tacking he can bring his craft into whatever port he desires. In every case natural law will work one way; but bring on the scene a person with intelligence and will, and he can so combine and manipulate natural laws as to make them serve his own purposes without in the least violating their invariability. If human persons are thus the masters of law, and if God is a Person, then God is not a prisoner of natural law.

Our text tells us plainly that God is a Person. It calls him Father, and he could not be a Father without possessing intelligence and will, without being a Person. Since he is a Person, we can say that the world is not run by law; it is, rather, run by God according to law. And while there are some prayers God will not answer, there are no good prayers which God cannot answer.

Whenever, then, you learn with Jesus to call God "Father," you have your charter which gives you the right to believe that God not only wants to hear your prayers and answer them but

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also that he is able to do so—"able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

### III

Go on now to note, in the third place, that while this word "Father" encourages us to seek God's help in prayer and makes us confident that he is able to give it, it also teaches us to trust him for the right answer.

Sometimes we are considerably concerned by the problem of our so-called unanswered prayers. We have full sympathy with the psalmist who sang,

O my God, I cry in the daytime,  
but thou answerest not;  
And in the night season, and am  
not silent. (A.S.V.)

We know what the person was talking about who wrote to her minister: "God never answers my prayers, so why should I keep on praying?" Does the text have any word for us here? I think it does. It tells us that the Person to whom we pray is a Person who has our best interests at heart and who can be trusted to give us the right answers.

For example, I remember when my son was about two years old and I took him with me when I went in to shave. No sooner had I lifted the razor out of the cabinet and put it down on the stand than his quick little hand would shoot out and take hold of it. It was a shiny toy, and he wanted to play with it. I was his father, and he had a right to expect that I would give him what he wanted. Of course I had to take it away from him; and when I did, he cried and went and sat down in the corner, sulking. As he looked at me through the tears in his eyes, I could hear him talking to me: "You are my daddy, aren't you? If you are my daddy, I have a right to expect that you will give me what I want to play with. But

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you don't give it to me. You say, No. Therefore, on the rock of unanswered prayer my whole faith in you as my daddy is smashed into smithereens." But I knew that some day he would grow up to see that "No" was the only answer a father could give.

Perhaps you have a boy and he wants to drive your automobile. He watches you as you press the starter and shift the gears, and he feels it would be a wonderfully thrilling experience to drive your car. But you say to him: "Son, Daddy would like to let you do what you want to do, but you will have to wait. You are not old enough. You will have to grow some more and become better able to handle the power which is in this engine; else you might injure yourself or someone else badly." Though you have not answered his prayer as he wished it, you have not said "No" to him; you have said *wait*.

Of course one would not dare say that these pat little illustrations clear up the whole case. Plainly they do not. There are prayers going up every day from many an agonized heart, and some of these prayers are denied. No one would dare say, from the knowledge we now possess, that it is better so. But our charter does help us, where we cannot understand, to trust.

A few years ago a young doctor and his wife went to China as missionaries. God blessed them in their work there and gave them two children to make glad their home. But typhoid came, and the young doctor was taken. Two days after his death the wife wrote to friends in America: "As you know, these two years have been ones of perfect joy, perfect understanding, perfect love, and I praise God with all my heart for his gift to us of such love. . . . I cannot begin to understand; but I know *our* love for our little ones, and that God's love is infinitely greater. I can only trust that love."

This we believe, and this we know, and this we pray by: God is our Father. Where we cannot begin to understand, we can trust.

## VI

# *Faith in Forgiveness*

“There is forgiveness with thee.”

—PSALM 130:4

Stanley Jones tells in *How to Be a Transformed Person* that when he was in Japan, a young man leaned over the back of the bench on which he was seated and whispered, “Are you sure I am forgiven.” Dr. Jones assured him on the authority of the character of God in Christ that he was. A few minutes later he asked the same question, and was assured again. Then a third time he asked, “Are you sure I am forgiven?” and only this last time could accept the assurance. In writing about it Dr. Jones makes this comment: “There is nothing, absolutely nothing that man wants to know as much as to know whether his sins are forgiven.”

Psalm 130 bears him out. The psalmist is low in his mind, as we say; and the trouble with him is that his sins have given him a bad conscience. “Out of the depths” he cries, “Lord, hear my voice.” He can’t sleep, and the nights seem a thousand years long: “My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning.” Then light breaks, and he sings, “But there is forgiveness with thee.” The good news seems so good he cannot contain himself. His song becomes a

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shout, and he cries out to his people: "Let Israel, hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption."

The reason we need a faith in forgiveness is that the strongest demand of our nature is to be in harmony with God. We simply cannot stand to be at "outs" with our Creator, for everything seems wrong unless we are right with God. The trouble with sin is that it makes us wrong with God. It sets up a barrier between the two of us and makes us feel exiled, cut off, shut out from our true home. Forgiveness is the means by which the barrier is removed and the harmony is restored. It is the love of God making way for the life of God.

A bad conscience makes life a living hell, but as long as "there is forgiveness with thee," there is a way to peace. So we seek now a faith in forgiveness.

### I

Let us speak first to the man who has intellectual difficulties with this faith.

In our city the other day a meeting was held to consider traffic violations. The practice of giving courtesy tickets to out-of-town cars was discussed. An expert was brought in to rule on it, and what he said was this: "There is no provision in the current law which allows the city to 'forgive' a single traffic violation."

There is a way of looking at life in the same manner, and it troubles some people. They see the moral law which says that a man must reap what he sows; and they will tell you that in the light of such a law there is no provision by means of which God, or anybody else, can offer to forgive an offender. So it was that Bernard Shaw saw forgiveness as a "beggar's refuge." "We must pay our debts," he said.

Moreover, forgiveness is said to be not only not possible but also absolutely dangerous. Put yourself in God's place

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for the moment. Suppose you had set up a law which said that right is right, and wrong is wrong, and it is never right to do wrong; then someone comes along and does something wrong, and you say, "That's all right. Forget about it. You are forgiven." Would you not thereby let down the bars and encourage moral laxity?

The classic French dramatist Pierre Corneille in the play *Cinna* makes the Emperor Augustus say: "He who pardons easily invites offense." Is that not true?

A boy was guilty of a falsehood. His mother forgave him and told him, "Everything is all right now."

"But I still told a lie," the little fellow answered.

God could not afford to do anything to make that child think that a lie is anything but a lie. How, then, can he forgive and at the same time protect the dignity of his character and the moral government of his universe.

James Stewart tells about a painting of Faust—the same Faust who gambled with his soul. The picture shows a game of chess, with Faust at one side and Satan at the other. The game is almost over, and Faust has only a few pieces left—a king, a knight, one or two pawns. On his face there is a look of blank despair, while at the other side of the board the devil leers in anticipation of his coming triumph. Many a chess player has looked at the picture and agreed that the position is hopeless; checkmate is certain. But one day in the picture gallery a master of the game stood gazing at the picture. He was fascinated by the despair on the face of Faust. Then absorbed in the game, he looked at the pieces on the board. Other visitors in the gallery came and went, and still, lost in contemplation, he studied the board. Then light broke, and the gallery was startled by his ringing shout: "It's a lie! The king and the knight have another move!"

This is the gospel, and this is where Christ and his Cross come in. God is not a prisoner in his own world, checkmated by the law of his being. Love has found a way to forgive and

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at the same time safeguard the moral order of the universe. You cannot look at the Cross and think that a lie is anything but a lie. The Cross is the price God pays in order to pardon. Plato said, "It may be that God can forgive sin, but I do not see how." No wonder! For he knew nothing of Christ. But now, thanks to Calvary, the King has another move; and with good conscience you can accept the forgiveness which he proffers.

### II

So much for the man whose intellectual difficulties are a road block to faith in forgiveness. Look now at this second man. His trouble is not so much intellectual as spiritual. He considers that he is guilty of the unpardonable sin, and that, therefore, forgiveness for him is out of the question. On what road can he find a way back to the faith he needs?

I met that man once, and his hopelessness was tragic. His fear of being forever unforgiven had made him sick—so sick that his doctor had sent him to a hospital. Seeing that his illness was of the spirit, he sought out a minister. I did my best to reason with him. I told him that the unpardonable sin is a nature so steeped in sin that it is incapable of knowing itself to be sinful, that the very fact he felt himself guilty was proof positive that he was not beyond the pale. He saw the point and left with a ray of hope.

Before long, however, he was back. He had tried hard to find his faith on the basis of reason, but it didn't work. Was there no other way he could try?

I saw then that reason did not satisfy because his trouble was not in his mind. It was deeper than that. It was in what the Bible calls the "heart," the deeper level of the mind in the subconscious. He was easily able to believe the good news of the gospel of forgiveness with the intellectual assent of his mind. His trouble was that he could not appropriate the meaning of that faith by an act of trust which made it real to him.

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What he needed, therefore, was some means by which a faith that was intellectually valid could become emotionally vivid.

What we did then was to find a set of Bible verses which affirmed the truth he needed to make real to himself.

Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if *any* man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him.

He wrote these verses down on a piece of paper and agreed to use them. Every night before going to sleep, he took a few minutes to picture himself as in the presence of Christ, hearing a voice: "Him that cometh . . ."; "whosoever believeth . . ."; if any man. . . ." It proved to be what he needed. He came to the place where he could say with the psalmist, "There is forgiveness with thee"; and there he found his peace.

### III

Move on and notice that there is a third man who is looking for this faith in forgiveness. His trouble lies neither in the difficulties of the intellect nor in preoccupation with the spiritual malady of the unpardonable sin. For him the road block to this faith lies in his life. His difficulty is a moral one.

The place to look for light here is the Lord's Prayer. We are taught to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." The phrase does not mean that God forgives only in equal measure as we are willing to forgive. He is not such a tit-for-tat God as that. It is not outlining the ground on which

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God bestows forgiveness. Rather, it states the ground on which we can receive it.

There is a law of life here which we flout only at our peril. This law says that you cannot eat your cake and have it too. It says that you cannot hold a grudge against your enemy, nursing your hate and nibbling at a morsel with the sweet taste of revenge, and at the same time expect to enjoy the peace of conscience which comes from being right with God. It says that as long as there is a barrier between you and your enemy, left standing there by your own refusal to forgive, that same barrier will shut you out from the presence and the peace of God.

It is not difficult to see why. Here is a man who goes to see his minister. He has no peace of mind, he says. He has always been a Christian, and time was when he knew something of joy in his religion. But now this is all gone. His prayers do not seem to get through. He has lost touch with God and lives in the depths. What is the matter? What is the way out? Together they discuss the reason for this spiritual drought, and finally the matter is pin-pointed.

"Is there anyone toward whom you harbor ill feeling?" the minister asks.

Yes, it comes to light that there is. "But what does that have to do with God and me?" the man wants to know.

"Suppose you have two buckets," his friend says, "one filled with water and the other with oil. Both are full to the brim. You cannot pour the oil into the other bucket, because it is already full. Even if you could, the two would not mix. Now," he says, "one of the buckets is you and the other is God. He is unable to establish a beachhead in your life because there is no room for him. You are full of hate, and he is Love. Love and hate do not mix. If you really want to make room for God, you must pour out all of that hate. You must forgive the person against whom you are holding that grudge."

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"But," he said, "it was such a low-down, mean thing that person did to me. How can I ever forgive?"

There's the rub! How can I forgive? Where is the motive which can move a man to forego the sweet taste of getting even? The answer cannot be put into words. It must needs be painted in a picture.

Johnston Ross provides it for us in what he says is a true story. It was Communion Sunday in a church in New Zealand. After the sermon the minister gave the invitation to the table, and one by one the worshipers filed up and knelt at the Communion rail. One man, a native Christian, was seen to stay only a few minutes; before the minister reached him, he left and returned to his seat. After a few minutes he went back to the front, knelt, and received the bread and the wine. Later, when someone questioned him about it, he told this story:

When I went to the table I did not know whom I should have to kneel beside, when suddenly I saw by my side the man who a few years ago slew my father and drank his blood, and whom I then devoted to death. Imagine what I felt when I suddenly found him by my side. A rush of feeling came over me that I could not endure, and I went back to my seat. But when I got there, I saw the Upper Sanctuary and the Great Supper and I thought I heard a voice saying, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye love one another." That overpowered me. I sat down, and at once seemed to see another vision of a cross with a Man nailed to it; and I heard him say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Then I returned to the altar.<sup>1</sup>

This is the only answer I know to that man's question. The closer you get to Love, incarnate in that Man on the cross, the more you hold him in your mind's eye, the more he

<sup>1</sup> G. A. Johnston Ross, *Christian Worship and Its Future*, p. 52. Retold from P. J. MacLagan, *The Gospel and Its Working*, p. 82.

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works his magic. You find him doing within you what you could not do by your own will power. You get rid of your enemy by making him your friend. Then you pray, "Forgive, as we ourselves have forgiven." Then, the bucket being empty, the life of God flows in with all its fullness. Then you have won your way back to faith in forgiveness.

## VII

### *Faith in Your Brother*

"For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with . . . brotherly affection."

—II PETER 1:5, 7 (R.S.V.)

Even a blind man can see that brotherhood is no longer a luxury in our contemporary world. The missionary movement of the churches has brought Christians together in a World Council of varying nationalities. The Supreme Court has ruled segregation unconstitutional and removed the barrier between the races in the United States. The organized labor movement has given weight to the workingman so that he must now be bargained with by management. The trend toward church union among the denominations is bringing into a single communion people from north, east, south, and west. The inexorable logic of events is forcing us to put into practice the brotherhood which our Christianity teaches and our democracy is supposed to guarantee.

Here in our midst are three deep chasms which divide people from each other: the chasms of color and class and creed. Can we find anywhere a faith in our brother which has any chance of crossing these chasms and making our brotherhood workable? I think we can. Put it this way: "Make every effort to supplement your faith with . . . brotherly af-

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fection." When you look at these words in the light of the life of Jesus Christ, the steps into that faith begin to come into view.

### I

For one thing, if you are in earnest about winning a faith in your brother, you will be willing to see him through Jesus' eyes. When Jesus looked at a man, what he saw was a man, and not a Samaritan or a Galilean or a Greek. He did not lump people together in groups and then label the whole lot of them with tags. He saw people as individuals and dealt with them as persons made in the image of God and precious in the sight of God.

Much of our difficulty in getting along with other people who are different from ourselves comes from our failure at this point. We are victims of group prejudice, and yet the very word condemns itself in the eyes of a fair-minded person. For what is prejudice? It means to prejudge. It means to form an opinion without due examination—an opinion based on fancy or feeling. It means to be down on what you are not up on.

For example, we have had a lot of prejudice in the South about the North. I remember the story of a certain judge who lived in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and who was certain that no good thing could ever come out of the North. One morning he stood admiring a beautiful tree, a magnificent magnolia in a nearby yard. A younger man came up, and the judge spoke to him.

"John," said the judge, "that's the prettiest tree in all the world."

"Yes, Judge, it is a pretty tree," said John.

"John, what do you think makes that tree so pretty?" the judge went on.

John spoke of the deep green of the leaves and the delicacy of the blossom.

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"No, John," said the judge, "what makes that magnolia the prettiest tree in all the world is this—it won't grow above the Mason-Dixon Line."

Now there are those of us who grew up with something of this feeling. We were nurtured on the stories of the Yankees who came here and burned our homes. Down there in Mississippi we more or less had the idea that all Yankees had horns. We took what was true of those few who came down to ravage our countryside, and we pasted that label on the whole lot. Yet most of us have been north of the Mason-Dixon Line once or twice and never yet have seen a Yankee with horns. We have even discovered that the South has no monopoly on southern hospitality. The whole trouble was that we were prejudiced. We were down on what we were not up on. We had tied a whole lot of people into a bundle and pasted a label on them. Now that we are no longer blinded by our prejudice and can see our friends to the north of us as individuals and deal with them as men and not as Yankees, we have a better chance of getting along with them.

This is an insight which we owe to Jesus. When you read the New Testament with your eyes open, it is constantly amazing how quietly Jesus went about stepping over boundaries of prejudice. For example, we read the story of his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well and go on with our reading without thinking of the matter further. But there are two facts worth noting.

In the first place this person was a woman, and the first-century Jew was prejudiced against women as women. The strictest church people of that day were known as Pharisees, and every day a Pharisee would offer a prayer of thanksgiving that he was neither a Gentile nor a leper nor a woman. You remember that when the disciples returned to the well from a trip to town to get some food, they "marvelled that he talked with the woman."

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But more than this: this person was not only a woman; she was also a Samaritan, and that meant something. It meant that here was the representative of a group against whom the Jews were strongly prejudiced. The Samaritans were a hybrid race, the leftovers of the Assyrian invasion of some seven hundred years before. They were the people at whom others looked down the nose. The Bible doesn't blink the fact. It sets it down in black and white. It says plainly, "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." Here was about as strong a racial prejudice as you will ever find. And yet when Jesus looked at this person upon whom others looked down, what he saw was neither a woman nor a Samaritan, but a human being: an individual, made in the image of God, precious in the sight of God, needing to be redeemed by the love of God.

Back in the sixteenth century the Christian scholar Muret, a Protestant exile from his own city in France, fell ill in Lombardy and was taken to a pauper's hospital. The doctors, not knowing the scholarship of this patient, spoke in Latin and said, "Let us experiment upon the worthless animal." Whereupon their patient surprised them by speaking up in Latin too: "You call one worthless for whom Christ did not refuse to die?"

There you have it: not just another unit lumped into a mass and labeled worthless, but a person, a human being, an individual, made in the image of God and stamped with the likeness of God—one for whom Christ did not refuse to die. When once you learn to look at people through the eyes of Christ, this is the way you see them; for in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither bond nor free, neither white nor Negro, neither mill owner nor labor organizer. "A man's a man for a' that"; and once you see him so, then prejudice fades and the way is open for faith to begin.

## II

Some of us have lived so long without being accustomed to this consequence of our faith that, as individuals, it may be a little too late to catch up with our Lord on this point. What then can we do to learn to believe in that other fellow? We can do this: by means of a sanctified imagination we can put ourselves in his place, see how life looks through his eyes, and feel with him the reactions of his environment. Once we achieve this sympathetic identification with him, it will be easier to understand him.

Perhaps you have heard about that doctor who lived in a small town back in the horse-and-buggy days. The horse wandered off and was lost and the doctor had no means of getting from place to place to make his calls, so the entire town turned out to find the horse. Late that afternoon most of the people had come back without any success. They sat around the town pump bemoaning their failure, when someone looked up and saw the horse being led in by a boy who had always been regarded as rather simple-minded. Everyone wanted to know right away how he found the horse. "Well," he said, "I just said to myself, 'If I was a horse, where would I go.' I went there, and there he was."

"If I was a horse, where would I go?" How altogether essential is this business of sympathetic identification for any Christian who takes seriously the imitation of Christ. At the very core of his life was that high use of imagination. As Dr. Fosdick put it so well:

"He imaginatively saw the Prodigal's problem from within. He put himself in the place of the widow when she dropped her gift into the treasury. He became blind Bartimaeus when the cry rose from the roadside. He saw from within the way life looked to Zacchaeus, and from within he knew the secret sifting of Peter's soul by Satan. He saw men as one sees stained glass in a cathedral window: not from without in, but from within out."

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I heard one of our missionaries tell how he felt when he went to China the first time. The tables were turned, and he was the peculiar person. He was the one who wore strange clothes, who had a different color, who spoke a foreign language, who belonged to the minority group. He said it gave him a new understanding of persons different from himself in his own country, and from there on out he would try to put himself in their place.

There was a movie once which told the story of a scrub woman who for one day was allowed to enjoy riches and the fine things money can buy. The movie was titled *Lady for a Day*. If for one day this could happen to all of us and we could see how life looks through each other's eyes—the workingman sitting in the seat of management and the chairman of the board of directors tending the spindles; the colored man understanding the point of view of the white man and the white man feeling how life looks through the eyes of his Negro friend; the Jew and the Gentile, the Protestant and the Catholic, exchanging places to know how it feels to stand in the shoes of the other—if for one day we could play this game of fruit-basket exchange, what a wonder it would work in achieving faith in our brothers.

### III

There is yet a third thing to be said. If you are in earnest about winning faith in your brother, and are willing to take your cue from Christ, you can go out of your way to do something to help him; and the reflex of that action will do something to you.

You know that as a world we are sunk unless we can have peace that is permanent, and you are wise enough to understand that your part in this task is somehow to live in peace and brotherhood with persons who touch your life. But frankly you are having a hard time. There is some group of a different color or creed or class from yourself which you just

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simply cannot swallow, and here comes a preacher who talks about believing in and trusting these people and building between them and yourself a bridge of brotherhood. Suppose, then, you have been following the line of thought up to this point and find you cannot go along with it. The idea of every human as being of equal worth in the sight of God is rather out of your reach. You cannot go that far—yet. You have grown up with the notion that God has his favorites and that such a fact entitles them to top priority, and you simply cannot get used to these ideas of human equality. Furthermore, you have tried to learn to like members of that other group. You have sought to put yourself in their place; but frankly you know too much about them, as you say, and you just simply cannot develop any sort of sympathy or trust. The first two strikes have been too fast for you. Is there any chance of connecting on the third? I think so, for the simple reason that while you cannot will an act of faith, you can will an act of kindness; and the reflex of that action will set up a bond of brotherliness between you.

And until a Christian has gone this far in his relations with others, he is not entitled to a clear conscience according to the New Testament. For the love which Jesus counseled was the kind which desires the well-being of the other and which practices kindness in spite of lack of good feeling. In the gospel there are two words for love. One has to do with the emotions, the affections. When you love a person with this kind of love, you like him too; and you love him because you like him. But there is another kind: the kind that has to do with the will, the kind that carries with it a strong purpose to seek the welfare of its object and a will to do something to help him.

And this is the real Christian kind of love. You find it at its best in this Christ of ours. I wonder, for example, how Jesus felt toward those men who drove the nails into his hands. He was God, of course, but he was Man too; and it

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does not make sense to like people who drive nails into your hands. But he loved them nonetheless. He desired their welfare, and was willing to do what he could to promote their well-being. He prayed for them: "Father, forgive." He tried to find an excuse for them: "They know not what they do." And more than this: he went to his cross that they might be saved from their sins. The genius of Christian love is that it does not fluctuate with feeling, is not blown about by every kind of emotion; it remains constant because it is grounded in will power and gives evidence of itself in deeds of practical helpfulness.

And this is a handle which all of us can take hold of. You may not like that person different from yourself, or even trust him. You are too steeped in prejudice for that. You may not like him or trust him, but you can love him. You can go out of your way to do something to help him: the Democrat for the Republican, the Protestant for the Roman Catholic, the Gentile for the Jew, the industrialist for the laborer. And you find that there is nothing like kindness to break down the barriers which we build against others and to forge a faith which will bind them to us in bonds of brotherhood.

As Peter puts it: "Make every effort to supplement your faith with . . . brotherly affection."

## VIII

# *Faith in Your World*

“It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life.”

—I KINGS 19:4

When the First World War broke out in 1914, a man named C. E. Montague was on the editorial staff of the *Manchester Guardian* in England. Montague was eager to save democracy, and he tried to enlist in the army. But his hair was growing gray, and he was refused. So he dyed his hair, and at a hearing before another recruiting officer he was accepted. Before he left for the front, his colleagues on the paper gave him a dinner; and this is the toast with which they saluted him: “There are many men of whom it is said that their hair turned white in a night through cowardice. We drink to the only man on record whose hair changed color in a night through courage.” Idealistic Montague went through the war and saw what it meant. Then he watched the kind of peace that came out of war. One by one he saw the things he had loved and sacrificed for collapse in the postwar era. So he wrote a book about it. He called it *Disenchantment*.

This is something of the mood in which we find the prophet Elijah. He too had been through a war—a battle with the priests of Baal—and he was just about as blue as a man can

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get. He crawled up under a juniper tree, lay down flat on his back, and got ready to throw in the sponge. "It is enough," he said; "Now, O Lord, take away my life."

Without waiting to enumerate all the causes for such a feeling, even a blind man can see that people like Elijah are legion among us. Multitudes have lost faith in our world and are suffering from a heavy dose of the blues. Discouragement does something to religion. Most unbelievers become so, not so much by arguing themselves out of their faith, as by being discouraged out of it. If we are to maintain our hold upon the verities of religion, we must find a faith which can match our present mood with courage. How, then, can we learn to have faith in our world?

### I

The first element in such a faith must surely be a historical perspective. This is something which the psalmist had: "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." The very sound of those words is stabilizing. They are descriptive of the long look. And this is what we need today. A long look provides a wide horizon; and when we see things in their true perspective, mountains often dwindle into molehills.

They tell us that when the Teapot Dome affairs were boiling over and unpleasant things were being said about some public officials, a visitor in the White House said to Mr. Coolidge that a president certainly did have his troubles. "See that shore over there," said Mr. Coolidge, pointing through the window to Virginia. "A president once sat in this chair and saw the flag of rebellion raised over there. I haven't got any troubles."

It was so with another president in the White House. Whenever Woodrow Wilson lost heart over the apparent failure of his hopes for the world, he would go to his second-floor study and look out through the window across the Potomac

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River to Arlington and remember the words of General Lee: "It is history that teaches us to hope."

Roger Babson has in his library a shelf of books on history. Whenever he is tempted to feel discouraged, he goes into his library, shuts his eyes, reaches up and takes down one of those books, opens it at random, and begins to read. Before he has read thirty minutes he says, his discouragement is always gone.

Excavators dug up from among the lowest strata of the ruins of the city of Babylon a piece of a clay tablet; and when they had translated the writing, this is what it said: "Alas, alas, things are not what they used to be; children no longer obey their parents; everybody wants to write a book; and the signs are multiplying that the world is soon coming to an end." This is one of the oldest pieces of writing in existence.

Look at this picture:

It is a gloomy moment in history. Not for many years has there been so much grave and deep apprehension, and never has the future seemed so incalculable as at this time. In France the political cauldron seethes and bubbles with uncertainty; Russia hangs, as usual, like a cloud, dark and silent, upon the horizon; while all the energies, resources and influences of the British Empire are sorely tried, and are yet to be more sorely tried.

This report sounds as up-to-date as this morning's newspaper; while, as a matter of fact, it is part of an editorial which appeared in *Harper's Magazine* under dateline October 10, 1857.

My grandad, viewing earth's worn cogs,  
Said things were going to the dogs;  
His grandad in his house of logs  
Swore things were going to the dogs;  
His grandad in the Flemish bogs  
Vowed things were going to the dogs;

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His grandad in his old skin togs  
Said things were going to the dogs.  
Well, there's one thing I have to state:  
Those dogs have had a good long wait.

When, therefore, you hear people talking about the good old times—times when everybody obeyed the Ten Commandments and it was easy to believe in the victory of right over wrong—ask them what good old times they mean. In 1812, for example, Samuel Mills set out from his home in Massachusetts to become a missionary to the Indians in the southern states. Mr. Mills records that there was not a single Christian minister in all the territory extending from Memphis to Natchez on the Mississippi, and that in the whole of the city of New Orleans a copy of the Bible could not be had for love nor money. A little more than a century ago a visitor to Charlottesville, home of the University of Virginia, wrote to a friend concerning the open wickedness of the place: "When Satan offered the kingdoms of the world to Christ, he put his finger on this spot and said, You can have everything else but this—I want Charlottesville all for my own."

Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia was founded six months before the Declaration of Independence was signed. Ten years later not a single student there made any profession of Christianity. During the year 1787 a young man entered the college and sought to hold meetings in the interest of religion. One Sunday afternoon he gathered two or three students into his room, and together they read the Bible and sang hymns and said prayers. The other students protested violently. They actually rioted. When the president of the college called them in that night to inquire the cause of the disturbance, one of the leaders stepped forward and said, "Dr. Smith, these men have been singing and praying, and we can't have anything like that going on around here." In 1787 a prayer meeting caused a riot at Hampden-Sydney College; but today practical-

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ly everyone on the campus is a professing Christian, and more than a score are making preparation for the gospel ministry! "It is history that teaches us to hope."

If we are disheartened, then, it is because we are nearsighted. What we need is distance glasses. We need to learn that the lesson of life is to believe that, as Emerson said, "the years teach much which the days never know."

## II

First of all, then, a faith which possesses a historical perspective. Secondly, a faith which provides a sense of divine purpose. "If," old John Newton used to say, "you think you see the ark of the Lord falling, be sure it is due to swimming in your own head." There is no cure for the blues like a firmer grip on God.

The theory of evolution had its inevitable effect upon our philosophy of history. It led us to believe in something which has been called the doctrine of automatic progress. We thought that day by day in every way we were getting better and better. Then a man named Hitler came along and threw a monkey wrench into the machinery. The war which our fathers fought to end all wars did not work out that way, and now we are asking questions. Are we headed anywhere worth going, or will the march of time get lost in the dark? Is there some

Far-off divine event,  
To which the whole creation moves

or are we destined to end in some kind of cosmic crack-up? The only thing I know which can save us from despair in the face of such a possibility is faith in the divine purpose of a sovereign God, and here is a picture of the way it works.

When Hitler first came into power, a story about him went the rounds among Jews. It seems he was speaking one day to a

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large audience and majoring on his favorite theme of hatred for non-Aryans. There was a man of pronounced Semitic cast sitting on the front row. At the end of his speech Hitler jumped down from the platform and strode up to this man.

"What were you laughing about?" he shouted. "I wasn't laughing," the man said; "I was thinking."

"What were you thinking about?" Hitler asked.

"I was thinking about my people," said the Jew, "and about the fact that you are not the first man not to like us. Long ago there was a man named Pharaoh who didn't like us and did his best to get rid of us. For years we Jews have had a feast called the Passover, and at that feast we eat a little four-cornered cake in memory of Pharaoh. Then there was another man named Haman who didn't like us and tried to get rid of us. For years we have had a feast called Purim, and at that feast we eat a little three-cornered cake in memory of Haman. While you were standing there speaking, I was sitting here wondering what kind of cake we are going to eat to remember you by!"

One day Adoniram Judson was lying in a foul and fetid Burmese jail. He had thirty-two pounds of chains around his ankles, his feet were tied to a bamboo pole four feet from the ground, and the mercury stood at 100°. He had come to Burma as a missionary and had landed in jail. Things looked black for him.

"Well, Mr. Judson," a fellow prisoner said with a sneer, "what do you think now about the prospects for the conversion of the heathen?"

"Sir," answered Judson without batting an eye, "the prospects for the conversion of the heathen are just as bright as the promises of God."

"Son of man," says George Matheson, "whenever I doubt of life I think of thee."

## III

Not only historical perspective. More than divine purpose. The third element essential for a faith in our world is personal commitment to active service in the cause which you want to win.

"Nothing earthly," said David Livingstone, "will ever make me give up my work in despair. I encourage myself in the Lord my God and go forward."

Inaction is always productive of despondency. Look at Elijah. "He . . . came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life." And the Lord said, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" The truth of the matter is, he wasn't doing anything. He was sitting down, ready to throw in the sponge because things looked so discouraging. As long as he had a prophet's work to do—as severe as that work was—all went healthily. But he was on the sidelines now, sitting still with both hands folded, doing nothing. To rouse him out of his despondency, God gave him something definite to do.

Once during the thick of the Reformation fight, when Luther was forced to go into retirement and become idle for a season, he became very blue. He wrote to his friend Melancthon, "Would that we might live no longer! Our God has deserted us." It is always so with men who watch the battle from their armchairs instead of from the middle of no man's land. Men like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and Bernard Shaw, sitting comfortably apart, always become pessimists of the thirty-third degree. But men and women like General Booth and Dwight Moody and Jane Addams, fighting the good fight with all that they have, never doubt that God will win. The player sitting on the bench on the sidelines may give up hope and think the game is lost. But let him get into the play. Send him into the game, and he will not give up hope against the greatest odds until the final whistle blows.

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Elijah, what are you doing here? Anoint Elisha to be a prophet. Instead of spending your time talking about how weak the church is and how impotent to make Christ dominant in this complex modern world, get up and get busy! Take an active part in the religious life of your community by training young men for leadership and anointing them with the spirit of the unconquerable Christ.

Go to Damascus. Anoint Hazael to be king of Syria and Jehu to be king of Israel. Stop sitting still and whining about the state of affairs in the land. Take an active part in the political life of your country by supporting those men and measures you intelligently conclude will make most for the coming of the kingdom of God. Make your vote and your voice heard in the efforts toward securing a warless world and less liquor and cleaner movies and a cure for cancer and the right of everyone to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Elijah, what *doest thou*? Away with your cowardly cynicism! Arise! Stand up, so you can see better! Look back, and see how far your world has come! Look up, and take stock of your resources! Lift up your eyes, Elijah! God is not dead! He is at work! He is at work in his world today! Cease being a part of the world's problem and make up your mind to become a part of the answer to that problem. Elijah, get busy for God!

The motto of the Friends Service Committee puts the matter in a nutshell: "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness." And the very act of lighting the candle will drive the darkness away from before your eyes and give you the courage for faith in the future of your world.

## IX

# *Faith in Eternal Life*

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life."  
—JOHN 11:25

"Tell me, man to man," an airman said to his chaplain, "do we go on living, or"—he paused, struck a match, and let the wind blow it out—"is that what happens to us?"

Mary and Martha watched their brother Lazarus in his last illness. The tiny flame of his life flickered until the wind blew it out. So it seemed. But Jesus came and found the sisters engrossed in grief, and this is what he said: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." If there is any answer to the airman's question, the clue to it must be in these words. Let us see what they mean as we seek a faith in eternal life.

### I

In the first place, if we believe in eternal life, it will be because we believe. This is to say, it is a matter which lies beyond the realm of demonstrable evidence. I cannot prove it to you any more than anyone else can disprove it. I can line up all the arguments in favor of it, which outweigh all the

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evidence against. But if you begin with a doubt, all the logic which can be summoned to its support will not convince you.

Yet we are not required to manufacture this faith out of thin air. It is not by blowing upon our hands and straining at our wills that we shall get it. This faith is part of a larger faith. Our Lord prayed, "This is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (A.S.V.). To know God through Christ—there is the fountain of our faith!

If you are a parent, you have seen little miracles of love born into your home. You have held them in your arms and played with them on your knee. You have felt their little fingers wrap themselves right around your heart. You love them more than you love yourself. Having brought them into being, can you think of yourself as ever consenting to their annihilation? Not until you can see yourself blotting out these little lives, throwing them away upon the dust heap of oblivion, have you any right to believe that God will surrender his children to the grave. We must believe in eternal life if we believe in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The same faith which gives us assurance of immortality relieves our minds of any concern for the nature of that life in the future. All kinds of questions are asked at this point. What is it like there? Will we know each other? What about the pearly gates and the golden streets and the harps? Well, I do not lose sleep over these questions any more than I did during those months when my mother carried me beneath her heart before I saw light of day in this world. When I arrived, I discovered that love was here ahead of me. Its fingers had knitted little warm things, and its hands had placed a cradle in the corner of the room. A mother's thoughtful care had anticipated all my needs and had planned for my highest well-being. When the time comes for my birthday into the next world, I confidently rely upon Love to do the same thing for me there which it did for me here. I have no idea what

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it will be like; what I do know is this: whatever my needs are, they will be met.

This is the first article of my belief about eternal life. I believe in it because I believe in the kind of God given us by Christ.

## II

The second thing I learned from discussions with a friend of mine down in Tampa. He is an older man, a retired Episcopal clergyman named Cary B. Wilmer. He pointed out that whenever the New Testament refers to eternal life, it is pictured as a present thing.

This is what Jesus is talking about in the words spoken to Mary and Martha there in Bethany. Lazarus has died, and Jesus has been sent for by the sisters. Martha meets him and says, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

Jesus says, "Thy brother shall rise again."

Martha replies, "I know that he shall rise again . . . at the last day." She believed, she said, in a far-off resurrection. There was a day far down the corridors of time—a remote and distant day—when Lazarus would be called out of death into life. But the thought of that distant day gave her little comfort in the presence of her immediate loss. In reply to that word of Martha's about a postponed resurrection, Jesus says to her, "I am the resurrection, and the life."

There are two big words in this sentence—two of the biggest in the dictionary. When you come to see these words in their proper relation, in that moment you get your head up out of time into eternity. These words are "resurrection" and "life"; and the question is, which is the larger? Does our Lord make it possible for a man to go on living after he dies, because he can provide a resurrection; or is there a kind of life possible in the present which carries resurrection along with it? Undoubtedly the latter. Life is the cause of which resurrection is the consequence. Bury a stone in the ground, and it will stay

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there until you dig it up. Bury a seed in the ground, and it will come up; because when you put it there, it carried with it the germ of life. So Jesus says, I am the resurrection because I am the life; because I possess within myself now a quality of being which is eternal and which does go on living.

When you stop to think about it, this word of scripture is backed up by the voice of reason. For if eternal life does not begin now, what magic is there in the fact of dying to make it so? It has to be eternal when it goes in on this side of the grave if it is to be eternal when it comes out on the other side. Just because it is eternal, time has nothing to do with it. It belongs to the *now* as well as to the *then*, to the *here* as well as to the *hereafter*.

### III

Go on to note a third fact: when once we get our hands on that kind of life, we are set free from the fear of death.

There are two factors which make us afraid of dying. The first is that it may mean the end of everything; that there is nothing more beyond; that dust is our destiny; that we are like a blown-out match. It goes against the grain with us to think that when we are through here the only thing left is nothingness. And this first fear fades in the light of the realization that God is a father who will not consent to such a fate for his children.

There is a second fear which adds terror to the experience which we call death. Even when we succeed in winning through to a faith that life is a continued story, we still face the fact of judgment. After death comes the judgment, we are told, when every man must give account of the deeds done in the body. And the thought of the necessity of judgment is what makes the prospect of death so terrifying to many persons.

But Jesus says that once a man pulls over into the lane of through traffic, he can check off that fear also. Listen:

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"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life [now], and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life" (A.S.V.). The test which we must face in any judgment is Christ; if you face that test now and come through—if you take Christ as your Friend and make him the Lord of your life—you already have eternal life. You have received your passing grade, and the test need not be repeated. "He . . . cometh not into judgment," because he has already passed.

You remember when you were in college what a serious and solemn time was the week of final exams. Everybody wore his face at half-mast. It was serious because it was a day of judgment. Some would pass and receive diplomas, and some would not. But others were not required to take the exams, because they were exempt; the quality of their daily recitations and the excellence of their term papers had already earned them a passing grade. You can remember getting word that notice of exemptions had been posted. You made straight for the bulletin board and ran your eye down the list and, sure enough, there was your name. Exempt! No final exam! You came not into judgment, because you had already passed; and you were greatly relieved.

It is not otherwise here. "He that hath the Son hath life"; "he . . . cometh not into judgment," because he has already crossed over. Death becomes only a door, and you have no more fear of dying than you have of walking from the dining room of your home into the living room.

## IV

Thus far have we come: God is a Father who will not consent to a future of nothingness. There is a life which begins now—the life of God in the soul of man, which goes on living. Because death cannot stop it, and because the question of a judgment has been settled, there is nothing left to fear about death. Go on to note, then, a fourth fact: If the life we live

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there begins here, then the quality of that life there will depend upon the preparation made for it here.

A college professor said to his class one day, "Boys, what you are at twenty, you will be at forty, only more so." What you are here, you will be hereafter, only more so. Death will translate you, but it will not transform you. If you wish to go to heaven and to find it heaven and not hell, then this fact begins to make some demand upon the present. As Paul puts it, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." Leslie Weatherhead goes so far as to say that he never thinks of heaven and hell as two *places*. "I think it must be hell to be in heaven," he says, "and not be able to enter into its delights—like being at an endless concert and being deaf, or like being at a banquet and having no appetite."

This fact of the carry-over from the present into the future has a bearing also upon another question which is always coming up. Sit down to talk with a group about the deep things of God, and someone will invariably come up with a question about a second chance after death. How can God be God, so it goes, and fail to give a fellow a second chance?

The answer is that we see running through all of life a law which says that either you must use or you will lose. You are born with a capacity for responding to the life of the spirit; but if you do not use it, you will lose it. You will sin away your chance therefore, not because God is unwilling to give it, but because you have robbed yourself of the power to accept it.

There is a fascinating book on this theme by the English author C. S. Lewis.<sup>1</sup> In a dream he learns that there is a bus which runs regular excursions from hell to the very borders of heaven. The damned are under no obligation to return to hell. They could stay on in heaven if they pleased; but they do not choose to do so, because they do not feel at home there. They have never learned to qualify for the kind of pleasures which is to be found there.

<sup>1</sup> *The Great Divorce.*

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This fact brings the truth of eternal life back out of the dim and distant future so that it confronts you with the cruciality of the present. This is the reason why the New Testament is always concerned with the urgency of the moment. It says that tomorrow depends upon today; and that, therefore, "now is the day of salvation." It says that if you are not born from above; that if you spend your time living like an animal, eating and drinking and lustng; that if you don't learn to find pleasure in the presence of God and his Son Jesus Christ; then heaven will be a total loss for you—it might even be hell.

### V

For some years this is as far as faith in eternal life went with me; and then, from reading the books of Leslie Weatherhead as much as from anything else, there began to dawn upon me a final truth. It is that the Christ who rose from the dead and walked out of the tomb 1900 years ago lives on and is still alive today, and that his friendship is a transforming power which can help us to begin to live eternally right here and now.

As you go back and read again the pages which tell the story, you discover at once that this fact was the first meaning of the resurrection for the friends of Jesus who knew him in the days of his flesh. It meant that their Lord was alive and constantly with them. For forty days he went in and out among them; and though his appearance was changed, and though the manner of his coming and going through closed doors was more than they could understand, yet he allowed himself to be seen often enough for them to know that their friend was yet alive and his Presence was always with them. "He is not here"—here in the tomb, said the messengers. Then where is he? He is there beside you, though you see him not—there in the Upper Room, there on the Emmaus Road, there on the sand beside the lake, there in Jerusalem and in Ephesus and in Corinth and in Rome and in London and in New York

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and in Tokyo. He is not here but is risen—risen to live forevermore as your eternal Contemporary and Companion in need.

Dr. Weatherhead says he had a dream, and in his dream he saw a working girl who lived by herself in a small boarding-house. Her work was monotonous, and she had few friends, so that her lonely existence had come to seem meaningless, and she was losing the high ideals with which she had left home. In his dream Dr. Weatherhead saw her sitting in her dingy little room and weeping over the pettiness of her life. Then she suddenly looked up to see Jesus standing beside her. She started to tell him all about her troubles but recognized that he knew about them already—and about her own shortcomings as well.

"Tell me," she said as he continued to look at her, "what is it you see?"

"I see the possibilities of a glorious womanhood," he said. "I see the possibilities of a life dedicated to God."

"But I have broken all my resolutions. I have lost my chances. I have lost my ideals. I have lost my faith."

"The Son of man," Jesus answered, "came to seek and to save that which was lost."

The girl found her life suddenly filled with a glorious new hope. Her better self was reborn. After a few moments Jesus left, but at the door he promised: "You will never be alone again; every day I am with you."<sup>2</sup>

"Tell me, man to man," said the airman, "do we go on living?" Once you have been in the Presence, you can give him his answer.

<sup>2</sup> *The Transforming Friendship*, p. 19. By permission of Abingdon Press.

## X

# *Faith That Grows*

“Till we all attain . . . unto a fullgrown man . . . : that we may be no longer children . . . ; but . . . may grow up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ.”

—EPHESIANS 4:13-15 (A.S.V.)

The school year had come to its close. The teacher was standing at the door bidding her first-grade pupils good-by.

“Teacher,” one of the little boys said, “I sure do like you. I’d like to stay in your room next year, but I’ve been promoted. Gee, I wish you knew enough to teach me in the second grade.”

So it is sometimes with our faith. Time makes us grow up. We go from stage to stage in our experience. At one stage our faith comes to meet us on that level and our needs are cared for. Then we are promoted. Time marches on, and we find ourselves in the second stage. If our faith does not grow up with us, we are in a bad way.

## I

All of us started out with a childish faith. We believed in God all right, but for all practical purposes just about the only place he touched our lives was with his set of rules.

For example, I remember liking to play marbles when I

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was a boy in grade school. There were two ways of playing: you could play for fun or play for keeps. Playing for fun meant that you gave back all the marbles you won, and playing for keeps meant just what it said. The time came when playing for fun was no longer fun; but when I wanted to play for keeps, my mother said "No." When I asked why I couldn't play for keeps, she said that would be taking something which belonged to somebody else, and God didn't want us to do that. God was somebody who made a set of rules, and for some reason we were supposed to obey them.

Some of us grew up in a home and at a time when Sunday was still Sunday. You wanted to go swimming, but you couldn't because it was Sunday. You wanted to play baseball, but you couldn't because it was Sunday. You wanted to go to the movies, but you couldn't because it was Sunday. When you wanted to know why you couldn't do these things, you were told that in a book called the Bible, God had laid down some rule about keeping the Sabbath day holy. Wherever you turned, you bumped into some rule; and when you found out that God was always at the bottom of it, you naturally came up with the notion that religion was obeying a set of rules and nothing else.

In the nature of the case most of these rules were negative. When someone asked a little boy his name, he answered, "My name is John Don't." He had heard these two words used together so often, he thought they were his name. Most of us grew up feeling the same way about religion. God was somebody who was always saying *don't*. Don't do this, and don't do that. You can't bet on a football game because betting is gambling, and gambling is a form of stealing, and there is a rule which says, "Thou shalt not steal." You can't crib on an examination because that is dishonest, and there's a rule which says you must be honest. You can't let yourself go and have a fling with the ladies, because there's a rule that says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." You can't drink because

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drinking will make you drunk, and God has a lot to say about drunkenness. This business of following a set of rules hems you up and fences you in; it loads you down and ties you up. You get so tired of being loaded down and fenced in that, if this is all there is to religion, you begin to wish you had never heard of God.

One reason why so many grown people are at odds with the church is that they are still stuck in the first grade. They started out with faith in a God who laid down a set of rules, and they have never gone beyond this idea. For them God is the great joy-killer who takes all the fun out of life, and religion is a strait jacket which shuts them off from the green pastures of pleasure and freedom. If you are one of these, the trouble, my friend, is not with religion but with your idea of religion—with your childish faith. The thing for you to do is not to thumb your nose at God but to get your hands on a faith that grows.

## II

Move on now and notice that in its second stage faith sees beyond a set of rules for you to obey and finds a set of answers to your questions.

You grow up out of the grades, you graduate from high school, and you find yourself in college. Your mind begins to wake up. You start thinking; and when you start thinking, you begin asking questions. The time has come when you are beginning to shed the secondhand faith which you inherited along with grandfather's watch, and you are getting hold of God firsthand. You begin to have doubts, but they are only the growing pains of a growing faith. You are coming to grips with reality, and you must have what the folks who write books call a "philosophy of life." You put your questions before the house, and you must have a set of answers which interprets the facts in a way that gives meaning to experience.

For example: You have always been taught to pray, but how can your prayer for a friend a thousand miles away possibly

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do any good? You have always been taught that the Bible is the Word of God, but how can you believe the Old Testament is inspired when it has so many things in it that are not even Christian? You have been told that Jesus is divine, but how do you know he is different from any other carpenter? You read in the Bible that Jesus rose from the dead, but how can you prove it? Or how can you prove there is a God for that matter? If there is, and he is good and all-powerful, why does he let good people suffer and bad people prosper? How could Paul write down that all things work together for good and keep a straight face?

You see, when you grow up from being a child and become an adult, you need a mature faith; and a mature faith must be able to look the facts in the face and ask any question it likes. For example, what about this business of rules which are always saying *don't*? Where do they fit into the picture?

Well, when you put your brain to work on that question, you begin to see that this world in which we live has a mind of its own. You can't live just any old way and get by with it. Some things go, and some don't. A person named God was in on the job when things got under way, and he called the signals. He fixed it so that some things would work and some wouldn't. The things that will work he labeled right, and the things that won't work he called wrong. For that reason you can't break one of his rules to save your life, but you can be broken by it. The thing is not wrong because the rule says so, but the rule says so because it is wrong—because it goes against what is your best interest. God's rule against gambling is not put there because he wants to take the fun out of life for you; it is there because gambling is not so much a way of getting something for nothing as of getting nothing for something. God's rule against adultery is not put there to deny you the pleasure of romantic adventure, but, rather, because broken homes break people. God's rule against drunkenness

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is not written to take your highball out of your hand and rob you of a little lift at the end of the day; it is put there because drunkenness makes people act like fools and ruin themselves and others. The laws of God are like the traffic laws; they are put there to keep you from running into a wreck and getting hurt. "I am come that they might have life," says Jesus—not death. When one of God's rules says *don't*, it says it in the same way and for the same reason that the neon sign on the corner says "*Don't Walk*"—in order to keep you from getting hurt and finding death instead of life.

When your faith grows up and grows out of its first stage, so that you see this rule business in the light of the full answer to your question, then you will cease shaking your fist in the face of God and begin to get down on your knees to him for marking the way with his *don'ts* and leading you along the path of a better way.

So it is when you look at all these questions like prayer and the Bible and the problem of evil. If you really seek them, you can count upon it that there are answers. These questions are like a tunnel: go halfway in and everything is dark, but keep on going and you will come out into the light. When you do, you will thank God that our Christian faith can always grow to meet the needs of a growing mind.

### III

Move on now and notice that there is a third stage in religious experience. All of us need a set of rules which can put morals into life. All of us need a set of answers which can put meaning into life. But—more than this—all of us need a source of strength which can put power into living. And this is there also. The psalmist makes a song out of this truth and sings: "The Lord is the strength of my life." The Lord is the strength of my life, *if—if I know how to pray.*

The trouble with most of us is that we have not found out this fact. We use prayer as an emergency measure. We depend

upon it only in crises. A friend told me how it was with him. He had a son in the Navy during the Second World War, and his ship was setting sail for the unpacific Pacific waters. My friend said, "The night Bob went on board I got on my knees and said my prayers for the first time in many years." But prayer which provides power must be a steady, day-by-day practice of the presence of God.

A little girl who was sick in the hospital waked up in the middle of the night. She lay there a long time unable to go to sleep. It was a strange place, and it was dark, and she was frightened. "After a while," she said, "I decided to talk to God for a few minutes—and then it was morning."

I talked to God—and then it was morning. There is a way of walking and talking with God which makes it always morning.

One day our Lord was about ready to take leave of his men. He had been with them in his physical presence for three years, and now he was going away. He said a strange thing. He said: I'm leaving now, in the sense that you won't see me any more. But the truth is, I'm never going away. I'll be with you every day. Those men believed this. They believed that when they shut their eyes, they could see him, and he was really there. The difference which that fact made with them was miraculous. It is a difference you can see on every page of the Book of Acts. The Lord had become, for them, the strength of their lives.

He can become so for you. You say that you can't see Christ; and because you can't see him, he is not real to you. But the truth is, those things are most real to us to which we give our attention. If you will give him your attention, and put a little time into the practice of his presence, you will find the strength he has to give. For example, if you will take ten minutes three times a day—morning, noon, and night—and go aside by yourself in some quiet place and be still, you will begin to see what we are talking about. You say that you do not have the

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time. The truth is, you take time three times a day to eat your meals whether you have the time or not. If you want spiritual strength, you will have to do the same for your spirit as you do for your body. When you have found your quiet spot, let your mind grow still. Forget yourself and your problems for a moment and think about the presence of Christ. Shut your eyes and see yourself sitting alone with him in your church. Remember that our Lord said he would never go away; that he is as close to us as our own thoughts; and that we have only to think of him, and he is here.

So then you shut your eyes and make a picture of him. You see him standing right there beside you. You notice the calm, quiet look on his face. You feel the touch of his hand on your shoulder. He begins to talk to you, and the tone of his voice is friendly and encouraging and strong and confident. He says, "Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest"; and the very sound of that word "rest" is like music, because your nervousness has made you so restless. He says, "Be still, and know that I am God"; and as you begin to let go and let God, you are on the way to finding new life. He says, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." He says, "My God shall supply all your need." He says, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." And almost before you know it, you are beginning to feel new life flood your veins and suffuse your entire being. You are being refreshed both in body and spirit. You begin to talk in the language of the man in the New Testament who said, "Ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man" (A.S.V.). Why, in him who strengthens me, I am able for anything. The Lord is indeed the strength of my life.

A long time ago you gave God his walking papers because you rebelled at the idea of someone who always stepped in and blocked the road by giving you a set of rules that said *don't* to the things you wanted to do. Then there came a whole flock of questions about God and trouble, and God

## FAITH THAT GROWS

always came off at the losing end, unable to square himself in the light of your idea of justice. If you are in the middle of that tunnel now, keep going; take the word of one who has been there: keep going, and you will come out into the light. And then when life catches up with you and you need something to lean on that is stronger than your own strength, shut your eyes and make friends with the Master. When you do, you will discover that he is a long sea mile from being a joy-killer and has become for you the life-giver.

A set of rules which can serve us as signposts? Yes. A set of answers which can satisfy the questions of our minds? Of course. But more than that: the practice of a Presence which can provide power for living. To that end the Apostle calls for a faith that grows: "Till we all attain . . . unto a fullgrown man. . . ; that we may be no longer children. . . ; but . . . may grow up in all things unto him, who is the head, even Christ."

*Faith That Can Face Trouble*

"My God, my God, why . . . ?"

—MARK 15:34

A great sultan, so the story goes, once bade his grand vizier compile a history of the human race. With long toil the task was accomplished, and the grand vizier came to the sultan with one hundred donkeys laden with five hundred volumes of historic lore. But when the sultan saw such a mountain of material, he was displeased and demanded that the history be cut down to readable proportions.

"Sire," said the grand visier, "all these volumes may be condensed into a single sentence: 'They were born; they suffered; they died.'"

Without pressing this somber summary too far, every one of us feels its realism.

A young wife who had suddenly lost her husband came to see me. She had always been religious, she said, but more and more the thing which had happened to her made her wonder: Why is it that a God who is good and powerful lets the worst things happen to good people? Every day that question of our Lord on the cross is echoed round us: "My God, my God, why . . . ?"

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As we seek to set our teeth into this question, we must avoid making any false claim. It is what the men who write books call an ultimate problem. This means that we can never, this side of heaven, find the full answer. But we do not need to explain it; we need only a working faith regarding it. Let us see, therefore, what truth we can find to help us.

### I

First, we can find partial answers to our problem. There are certain considerations that soften somewhat the sharp edges of this question.

For one thing, there is the fact that there is a problem of goodness demanding explanation also. There are two opposing mysteries in this world—good and evil. Because we believe in God, evil is a mystery. But if we should deny God, then goodness would become an even greater mystery, for no one has yet suggested how dust could of itself grow into a soul willing to give its life on a cross. We cannot solve the mystery of evil by saying there is no God; by that we would simply create for ourselves the much harder problem of accounting for goodness. When we balance the alternative—God and the mystery of evil or no God and the mystery of goodness—then the scales tip in favor of God.

For another thing, the problem becomes a bit less acute when we remind ourselves that our knowledge is limited and we are not qualified to pass judgment on the ways of God. A few additional facts might change the looks of things materially. Dr. Joseph R. Sizoo tells that one day in Antwerp he visited a shop in which the Belgian peasants were weaving a tapestry. Seeing that he was perplexed because seemingly there was no evidence of design, a weaver took him by the hand and led him to the other side of the piece on which he was working. "Then," says Dr. Sizoo, "I saw a gorgeous design slowly but surely woven into perfection, thread by thread and strand by strand." It is often so with us. We are looking at life from one

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side, and from this side it looks like a blotch, with the threads crossed and recrossed in wild confusion. But when we can see it from both sides and have more facts in hand, it is altogether possible that there is a design and that it will be to our liking. Now, says Paul, we see only the baffling reflections in a mirror, "but then face to face."

In the third place, we need to remember that we would be hard put to it to improve on our world. Before we set out to scrap life as God has made it, we ought to ask ourselves this: If we do not like the world as it is, what sort would we put in its place? We say we are seeking a happy world, but happiness does not come to the life that is softly cushioned. The silver spoon is no guarantee of happiness. It belongs only to those who face difficulties and dare to achieve.

For example, John Balderston has written a play about a man who dies and wakes up in a world of luxurious surroundings. An obliging attendant informs him that he has only to ask for what he wishes and it is his. He has only to name a book and it is handed him, or to recall a painting and it is placed before him. After a year or two of this effortless securing of any and everything he desires, however, he begins to feel bored.

"I am sick and tired of this everlasting ease," he says to his attendant. "I want to wish for something I can't have without working for it."

He is told that he has expressed the one wish for which no provision has been made in the world in which he is now living. And at that he loses his temper altogether.

"In that case I do not care to stay here," he blurts out, "I would prefer to go to hell."

"And where do you think you are, sir?" the attendant replies.

But there is a fourth fact which throws even more light: If we grant that character is the aim of human life—and I know of no other goal worthy of creation—then there are certain conditions which must exist in our world. There must

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be a system of regular law, else obedience could never be learned. There must be a possibility of progress from the less perfect to the more perfect, for it is only in struggle that we can grow. There must be some free will with which to choose between right and wrong. And there must be some interconnection of human relationship, else love, the crown of character, would be impossible.

But these very conditions, which none of us would give up, contain all the sources of suffering. Physical law, which guarantees stability in our universe, is also responsible for tornadoes and floods. Progress implies situations which are imperfect and wrong, through which we must struggle toward the best. Free will, which none of us would give up in return for a painless world, has in its misuse brought trouble all the way from Adam's eating the apple to Hitler's starting a war. And human interrelatedness, which means most to us, is yet the reason why often we are hurt. I asked that young woman whose husband had died if she would be willing to exchange having had a husband and having lost him for never having known a love like that and freedom from the pain of bereavement. She said, No. The ties which bind us in affection to those we love also bind us to the possibility of pain.

Let us then add up what we have: the alternative to the problem of evil that lies in the problem of good; the limitation of human knowledge which makes presumptuous a final judgment upon the ways of God; the realization that though this is not the best of all possible worlds, we should be hard put to it making a better one; the knowledge that the causes of suffering are conditions of life we would not give up. All these are facts which make it possible for some of us to accept suffering even though we cannot explain it.

## II

But we need not stop here. Along with the acceptance we have the assurance of the possibility of winning a practical

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victory over it. Not only are we able to make a place for it in our thinking. We can actually put it to good use. If this seems difficult, we can learn something here from the Christ whose cross is the prime example of good seemingly overwhelmed by evil.

For one thing, it is written of him that he was made "perfect through sufferings." This means that he took the trouble that came his way and turned it to good advantage. He became by means of it a person he would not have been without it. He was perfected in his suffering.

A writer who suffered a great deal was heard by a friend to pray for release from the suffering. His friend put a hand lovingly on his shoulder and said, "If that prayer is answered, it will ruin your English style." The friend knew that no one could write as he did except out of a heart of pain. A thorn in the flesh can plow the hard surface of a cold heart and make it good ground for the growth of the plant called sympathy.

Stanley Jones says that one day he saw an eagle in the Himalaya Mountains when a storm struck. He was afraid the bird would be dashed to pieces against the rocks. But as he watched, the eagle set his wings so that the harder the wind blew against him, the higher he rose by it. This is one thing you can do with your trouble—you can make the best of it by letting it make the best of you.

But there is a second thing you can learn from that man on the cross about the uses of pain. You can turn it to good use, not only for yourself, but also for the sake of other folk. When they had nailed up the Christ, they thought they had finished with him; but he turned the tables on them. He took hold of that cross and wrote with it on the sands of time the story of the good news of God's love, the gospel for the redemption of the world. He turned it to such good advantage for us that today we put it proudly on the tops of our churches. He made it count for you and me.

Can you not see here the shining of a light upon your

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darkened path? You have been saying, "My God, my God, why does this thing have to happen to me?" And he answers, "Let's put that question aside for the time being. Instead let's see how you can take this thing which has happened to you and use it for the sake of your fellow men."

Have you ever stopped to consider that there are some things a person with a cross can do for you that some favored son of fortune can't? By being a radiant soul in a difficult situation, Helen Keller has the power to bring a lift to your spirit which is denied to some shining young Apollo who knows nothing of the meaning of bearing a cross.

A successful businessman said he would never forget something his mother did for him when he was younger. She was an ardent golfer and played the game well. Then blindness struck her in middle life. Instead of whimpering, she called her three sons in and said to them, "Boys, I'm in a sand trap, but watch me take my niblick and get out." Our businessman said that the way she used her trouble stood like a landmark from which he had taken his bearings down across the years. Has it ever occurred to you that you too, by means of your cross, might set up a landmark for the sake of a fellow pilgrim?

### III

Finally, that Christ upon his cross has a further word for us about what we call the problem of suffering. We have not finished with the fact by explaining it or by using it. It is still our business to abolish what can be abolished. For while some hardship is necessary to hardihood in men, there are evils upon the earth which do not help man's moral quality. They are barbarous intruders upon God's will, and they have no place in his world.

When Abraham Lincoln was a young man, he went by boat from Illinois down the Mississippi to New Orleans. There one day he saw a young Negro sold as a slave on the auction block.

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What he said to himself there that day the world has never forgotten: "If I ever get a chance to hit that thing," he said, "I'll hit it hard!" The Christian solution to the problem of slavery lay not so much in its explanation as in its abolition.

What, then, is the cause of the cross which you wear in your heart? Is it the last war which stepped hard upon the life of one you love? Well, what are you doing to help build a peace which will make war an impossibility? Is it liquor which has turned out the lights in your home and made your world dark? Is it a broken marriage which has cut short your dreams? Is it some disease like cancer or polio? What are you doing to abolish the evils of the liquor traffic and divorce and disease? We have not closed our account with the problem of suffering until we make up our minds to become a part of the answer instead of acquiescing in the problem. The best defense of faith is not so much the explanation of evil as its annihilation.

It is amazing how true it is that, once we cease to be spectators and become active combatants, the question Why? dissolves into thin air and the big fact becomes How?—How can I help God win? The armchair philosopher who tries to keep the fact of evil at a safe distance by arguing about it can easily get discouraged out of his faith. But wherever you find a man like David Livingstone who goes out to help God paint some dark continent white, you will have a believer par excellence.

Stanley Jones writes in *Christ and Human Suffering* that once he went to the Garden of Gethsemane to spend the night in prayer about the words "Not my will, but thine," which he took to be the heart and substance of the Gethsemane incident. He says:

I expected to come away chastened, submissive, surrendered. But in those silent hours I found my thought shifting to the words of Jesus to the sleepy disciples: "Arise, let us be going"—let us be going to meet the betrayal, the rejection, the accusations, the

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spittle, the cross. . . . I came away from Gethsemane, not depressed into submission, . . . but with a battle-cry sounding in my heart.

The closer you get to Christ, the more clearly you will hear that battle cry: "Arise, let us be going"—to join the fight against the world's evil.

## XII

### *Saving Faith*

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

—ACTS 16:31

We customarily rob one of the big words of our religion of much of its meaning, and great is the loss thereby. This word is “salvation.” We begin by cutting it down to freedom from divine penalty; and we end by pushing it out into the future, so that to many of us salvation means getting into heaven, and nothing more.

But salvation is a present thing. You can get your hands on it now. And it is a much wider thing than pardon for past wrongs. It means to be set free from whatever hurts you and to be given all you need to help you find your way to your best self. If you worry a lot and want to be free from anxiety; if your conscience hurts you and you need to have it cleared up; if you feel that you are going to pieces and need something to pull you together; if you are lost in a fog of futility and seek a road that leads into meaningful living; if you are concerned about your eternal status and need to have your mind put at rest—if you are interested in any of these conditions, then you are interested in salvation, because that is

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what salvation is. It is freedom from whatever hurts you and the possession of whatever helps you—now.

If that is what salvation is, then we find ourselves, all of us, putting to the Apostle the question of the Philippian jailer: "What must I do to be saved?" How can I get my hands on this thing? Where can I go to find it? We hardly stop talking long enough to let the man make answer; we are all ears to hear what he says; and, when finally he speaks, we are disappointed in his reply.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," he says. We have heard that before, and it doesn't make sense. How can you get hold of the things we are talking about by simply believing something?

In this way: When Paul speaks here of believing, he uses a Greek word for which we have no exact equivalent in English. It is the same word that he uses so often in its noun form where we translate it "faith." So when Paul tells the man, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," he means, "Faith in Christ will save you." That opens up a world of meaning if we can only unlock two or three of the doors that lead into it.

### I

For one thing, Paul means what all of us have in mind when we talk about believing anything: we give intellectual assent to the truth of some proposition. Belief of this sort involves the action of the mind and nothing more. It is looking at a statement, such as two and two make four, and saying: I believe that: I accept that as true; I give intellectual assent to that proposition.

Here is the proposition which Paul offered to the jailer: God has spoken in Christ. Do you believe this? Do you accept with your mind, the bare intellectual processes of your brain, the fact that Christ is the last word about God? Do you know what you are saying when you say this? This is the most tre-

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mendous truth which has ever confronted the mind of man. It means two things: it means first of all that God is like Christ, and it means secondly that the life of Christ is the kind of life which gets God's approval. Once you are straight on these two points, there is nothing else that you really need to know: what you are to believe about God and what duty God requires of you. When you get hold of these two truths, with even the fraction of yourself which is your mind, you are well on the road to salvation.

For example, one afternoon I was calling on a family in my church. When the visit was over, one of the household said, "Before you go, I want you to do something for me. I have a hobby of studying life, and I like to get my visitors to write in a little book. Will you write down for me in one sentence your philosophy of life?" Well, I have never been asked to do that before, have you? It makes you think. Can you set down in one sentence the meaning which this whole thing has for you? After thinking a moment, I wrote this: "I believe that God is good, and that my business is seeking to share that good news with other folks."

Now that belief has not always been mine. Time was when I could not believe that God was good. There seemed to be too much against it. But a friend talked to me about it.

"You believe Christ is good, don't you?" he said. "You can't believe anything else when you see him in the gospels going 'round helping folks."

"Yes," I said, "I believe that."

"Well," he said, "don't you know that when you look at Christ, you are looking at God?"

I had not seen it that way before. My eyes were opened. In that moment I was saved—saved from an error in my belief about God, an error that covered the sun with a cloud. Now that cloud is gone. Ever since that time I have been living in the light of the love of God, and life is a different thing.

So meaningful has been this truth in the experience of some

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people that one man set it down on this wise: "Salvation is seeing that the universe is good, and becoming a part of that goodness." So, then, one of the gateways through which salvation comes is the gateway of the mind: willingness to give intellectual assent to the proposition that God has spoken in Christ.

### II

But there is more to the word of the Apostle than this. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ means not only the intellectual assent of the mind but also the trust of the heart. There is a difference between belief and trust, and it is this: belief is faith in a proposition; trust is faith in a person. I believe that two and two make four, but I trust my friend. Belief is an opinion about God, but trust brings an experience of fellowship with God.

In terms of everyday experience, you get sick and send for the doctor; and he gives you a prescription. You take the bottle of medicine in your hand, read what it says on the label, and believe it will cure. But if you fail to trust the doctor to the point of taking the medicine, you have no chance of getting well. You can go to a restaurant, read the menu, and say to yourself, I believe this meal is dietetically correct. But if you fail to eat it, you will still be hungry. This is the reason so many of us are sick or hungry in our souls. We are believers par excellence—we have creeds which are letter-perfect. But we have never taken the medicine or eaten the meal. We have never appropriated the meaning of our belief. We have never trusted God to the point of relying upon the truth that he gives. We are like the man who said he did not believe in ghosts but he was afraid of them just the same. The belief of his mind had not penetrated the emotions of his heart. This is the reason we say we believe in Christ and still fail to possess the salvation which he brings.

For example, take the matter of anxiety. One of the things our Lord wants to save us from is worrying. He is always say-

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ing: "Fear not." "Be not anxious." We say we believe in him, and yet we are always afraid. Let some woodpecker play a tatoo on the gutter of our house, and we go into a nervous breakdown because we have heard that sound means that death is coming to someone in the house. Let some black cat cross the highway in front of us, and even though we turn our hats round on our heads, we do not breathe easily till we have reached home. Let some letter come saying that unless we make ten copies and mail them to friends, some dire event will befall; and though we do not believe a word of it, we are afraid not to comply. Well, my friend, what do you believe? Do you believe that God rules this world, or do you believe that he has put things in the hands of a woodpecker or a black cat? If you say you believe in Christ and in his God, then really believe it. The very moment you begin to rely upon the truth you say you believe, in that moment you will be saved from the hell of all kinds of fear.

Said the Robin to the Sparrow:  
"I should really like to know  
Why these anxious human beings  
Rush about and worry so?"

Said the Sparrow to the Robin:  
"Friend, I think that it must be  
That they have no heavenly Father  
Such as cares for you and me."

If you do not trust the God you believe in, you lack the faith which brings salvation.

Or take another danger to our well-being—the guilt of wrongdoing. Your conscience hurts you, and remorse is eating you up. You can't sleep at night, and the loss of sleep is ruining your life. You need to be saved from that danger, and you go to see your minister. He tells you that "gospel"

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means good news and the news is that on the basis of true penitence and confession God is willing to wipe the thing out. You believe in Christ, but that good news sounds too good to be true; and you are sure that your sin is the kind that cannot be pardoned. Why is it that, though you believe, you cannot feel the thing is true. The reason is that your faith has stopped short in the area of belief and has not gone the length of trust; and until you are willing not only to believe in the gospel but also to rely upon its truth, you will never be saved from your guilty conscience.

The best picture of our truth I know of comes from an old man who had just been up for his first ride in an airplane. When he came down, someone asked him how he liked it. He didn't like it at all. Why?

"Well," he said, "that thing was so flim-flam I never could let go my whole weight on it."

Do you feel that way now—tight with tension because you are trying to hold yourself up? Your salvation waits, then, until you are willing to open this second door of trust: until you not only believe that the providence of God is good enough and the love of God is strong enough to take care of the uncertainties of the future and the guilt of the past, but also are willing to let go your whole weight in an act of trust that will let go and let God look after the burden of your mind.

### III

Belief and trust—these are two of the doors of faith by which we can enter into the meaning of salvation. But there is a third.

"I know I am saved," a man declared, "and so I don't intend to bother myself about doing all the things you preachers are always talking about."

"How can you feel so certain about your salvation?" the minister asked.

"Well," said the fellow, "don't you know your Bible? Don't

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you remember the place where it says, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved'? Now I believe on Christ, and I am saved; and I don't intend to give up those things which give me a good time."

Of course a casual reading of this verse would seem to put it open to some such misunderstanding, but any person in his right mind knows that it is not all right for a man to live any way he likes and then present his ticket with this text written on it and expect to get inside. What then is the answer to that seeming difficulty?

The answer lies in taking your pick and shovel and digging a little deeper into the meaning of this word for "have faith" that Paul uses. When you do, you find that it is as big a word as life itself. After analyzing every passage in the New Testament where the Apostle wrote the word, the noted biblical scholar J. H. Thayer summed it up, in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, by saying that faith in Christ for Paul meant "a conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah—conjoined with obedience to Christ."

"Conviction"—what we have called belief—"full of joyful trust"—the very word we have used—"conjoined with obedience to his commands." There in that third step, is the answer to our question. For it says that you have no right to claim Christ's salvation without doing your dead-level best to live up to his challenge: "Simply to Thy cross I cling" is but half the gospel. No man is really clinging to the cross unless at the same time he is striving to fulfill the demands of the good life.

You can see why the faith that saves goes beyond belief and trust to control conduct. Suppose my besetting sin is losing my temper, and that is what I need to be saved from. I believe in Christ and trust him but do nothing about obeying his commands. I am not saved in the least—my temper still has hold upon me. But suppose my faith goes on to lay hold upon my life and in company with Christ I achieve that self-control

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which is one of the fruits of his spirit. In that case, I am in truth saved because I no longer lose my temper. No matter what your sin is—whether it be worry or temper or resentment or hatred or drink or infidelity or gambling or greed—no matter what it is, if your faith goes all the way of obedience to the commands of Christ, you will be saved. You will just simply stop these things, because they are out of harmony with the law and the life of Christ.

And if you don't? Then you are not saved. If you say you believe in Christ, but continue to be unkind at home, tricky in business, lazy in the church, and a leech on the community, it is evident that salvation has not "taken" with you. And if by salvation you mean in the future, then it is the time to wake up to the word of our Lord: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord"—not everyone that says he believes—"shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Why? Why is it necessary to do the will of God now, to give obedience to the commands of Christ? Because if you are not in step with Christ here, you will feel out of place with him there. What you are here, you will be there, only more so. Death will translate you, but it will not transform you. If you want to go to heaven and find it heaven and not hell, begin now to get ready.

It turns out, then, that our part in salvation is not so simple after all. The faith that saves is the total response of the whole self to the will of God. It is the response of the mind in belief, the heart in trust, the will in conduct. It is to accept the fact that God goes all out for us, and then to be willing to go all out for God. It is to give a flesh-and-blood setting to the spirit of Christ. It is not an easy thing to do, but the prize is worth the cost: Faithful servant, well done; enter into joy.

"I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God": "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

## XIII

### *Mountain-Moving Faith*

"If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

—MATTHEW 17:20

Our Lord seems to have laid great store by faith as a force in human experience. The first three Gospel writers quote him on it. In Luke he makes it apply to uprooting a sycamore tree, but in Matthew and Mark he talks about the way it can move mountains. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed," he says, "ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

We shall have to begin by saying that Jesus did not mean to be taken literally. Faith is not magic which can move land and sea and stars. The statement is conscious hyperbole; its striking exaggeration is intended to carry his point that faith is a force in itself. There is hardly anything smaller than a mustard seed, and there is nothing larger than a mountain. Even the smallest faith can have large consequences.

This is what he is saying, and this is what many of us need most to learn; because a lack of faith is the one reason above all others why so many people go around as defeated persons.

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When Joshua sent the spies out to look over the Land of Promise, the majority report had it that the place was filled with giants, "and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers." As long as you look upon your tasks to be done and your responsibilities to be borne as giants and upon yourself in relation to them as a grasshopper, you will make mountains out of molehills. But once you can follow the lead of our Lord in this matter of faith, you can make molehills out of mountains. It is the difference between living on top of the world and living with the world on top of you. If you could face every day with the knowledge that you are its master, life would be a different thing.

What our Lord is saying is that faith will do just that for you. If you have only a mustard seed's worth, you can move a mountain and "nothing shall be impossible unto you." Let us see how this faith can be fashioned into fact for us.

### I

The first step is to realize that faith power is stronger than will power. We of the West are legatees of a heritage which leads us to glorify will power. We regard the necessity for faith as an admission of weakness, and we picture our supermen as square-jawed and clenched-fisted. But when you come to terms with the facts, you realize that faith power is what we really need. Unless a person believes deep down inside himself that he can do a thing, no exertion of will can make him succeed. "They conquer," says Emerson, "who believe they can." And Jesus puts it on this wise: If you have faith, you can move a mountain.

Oftentimes you have heard some person say: "Somehow, when I started, I knew I was going to succeed." He hardly realizes that it was his confidence in success, his belief that he would succeed, that gave him his power to surmount his difficulties and win his way to victory. All round you, you see men failing simply because they lack the confidence that they

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will succeed; while men with far less ability and talent, but with greater daring, carry off the prizes. One person made a study of the lives of three hundred persons whom the world calls geniuses, and from that study he distilled a recipe for achievement: persistence of effort, strength of character, and confidence in one's ability. Long ago I saw the truth written on a wayside pulpit in these words: "Success comes in *cans*, failure in *can'ts*."

I remember what this faith power did for a football team once. In 1924 Jess Neely now of Rice Institute came to Southwestern at Memphis, Tennessee, to begin his career of coaching college football. He found a team which had no confidence whatsoever, and his first game was with Sewanee, a notable power on the gridiron. On the trip to Sewanee his team changed trains in Nashville, and Neely had his former coach at Vanderbilt, Dan McGugin, come down and give his boys a pep talk. While the members of the team huddled in a corner of the railroad station, McGugin drove home his point: "You boys are as good as Sewanee; all you've got to do is to believe that fact and then go out there and play football." Southwestern did not win, but she lost by only one touchdown; whereas the score the year before had been 34-0. There was no more will to win in 1924 than there had been in 1923; but there was more faith power, and it made a difference of twenty-seven points! You cannot beat our Lord when it comes to knowledge of human nature: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you."

There is a perfect picture of this fact in a book titled *Wake Up and Live*, by Dorothea Brande. The author tells about a young actress who worked as understudy for the star in a certain cast. The troupe was on the road; and one night when the star suddenly fell ill, the understudy was called in to pinch hit. She had rehearsed the part a hundred times, and she knew her lines backward, but she lacked experience, and the footlights gave her stage fright. She appeared altogether helpless,

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and it was a dark moment for the director. Suddenly he hit upon an idea. He knew the girl possessed the ability and was familiar with the part, so he had her hypnotized. Once she was set free from the stage fright which was paralyzing her powers, she performed with brilliant success.

This story is a parable. Many of us possess the ability to move our mountain, but we sit down in front of it, admitting our failure. Why? Because we cannot believe. Because we lack faith. Because we have no confidence in our ability. "O ye of little faith," says Jesus. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it will remove; and nothing will be impossible unto you."

So, then, the first thing you have to do is lay hold on a mustard seed's worth of faith. When you have to move a mountain; when you have to make a speech in public or interview an important prospect or take an examination, when you face a long future in a marriage that is both disappointing and difficult or a mountain of bills which has piled up through installment buying, or when a combination of any of these factors is getting you down—start out by saying, "I can!" The difference between us and the man who succeeds is that we say, "I can't," and he says, "I can." We are defeated before we start, because we know that we shall fail. He succeeds because he says, "I can"; because he faces any mountain that is in his way in the confidence that he can move it, and so he pictures himself as succeeding rather than as failing. You just cannot get away from it: If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can move a mountain.

## II

All that we have said up to this point will sound like inviting a man with both legs gone to have a game of tennis.

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Somebody defines faith as believing something you know is not true. If you tell your friend that mountain-moving faith begins by having confidence in yourself and facing any task in the assurance that you can accomplish it, he will come right back at you and say, "That's my whole trouble: I do not have that confidence. If I try to tell myself that I have, I will be spoofing myself, and the whole thing will be nothing more than a bit of whistling in the dark to keep up my courage."

The answer to that is that this saying of Jesus can never be allowed to stand by itself. It must always be linked to another fact which stands out on almost every page of the gospel record. In one place you find our Lord putting it like this: "I can of mine own self do nothing . . . ; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." If we begin by saying that faith power is stronger than will power, then we must go on and say that we are entitled to have faith in ourselves only because we have faith in God.

For that reason you must take a second step and learn to put it this way: I have faith in myself because I have faith in God and in his power to make me able. Listen to the Apostle and note that this is the way he sized things up. He began by saying, "*I can*—I can do all things." But note further that he did not stop there. He went on to put it this way: "*I can do all things through Christ.*"

I can because he can, and because he will make me able. It reminds you of the boy who was helping his father to remove some stones from a ditch.

"Dad, here is a big stone," said the boy. "I have done my best, but I can't budge it." "Son," replied the father, "you have never done your best until you have asked your father to help you."

That is something for all of us to remember. You have never done your best until you have asked your Father to help you. Here is God, the source of all power, and here you are. When

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you turn the corner of turning yourself over to him and putting your life into his hands, it makes a world of difference. Without him you can do nothing, but with him there is nothing you cannot do. For, as some wise man put it a long time ago, the waters of the Gulf Stream will flow through a straw, if the straw be placed parallel with the Gulf Stream.

A soldier came home from overseas minus a leg. The amputation following battle wounds shocked the boy's mind deeply. He lay on his bed neither smiling nor speaking—just staring at the ceiling. He would not cooperate in learning to wear an artificial limb, although others around him were doing so. Obviously his problem was not his physical body but was in his mind and spirit. So deep was his acquired inferiority that he had completely given way to defeat.

... He came of a well-to-do family, and at home he had every attention. In fact, his family overdid. He was tenderly lifted into his bath . . . and coddled in every conceivable manner. . . .

However, the doctor realized that they were making a permanent invalid of the boy. Accordingly he placed him in a convalescent hospital. An effort was made to help him to help himself, and to give him a normal attitude toward the problem of himself, but with no success. He continued to lie on his bed, indifferent and uncooperative.

One day the rather baffled and exasperated young doctor said, "I have got to be hard on the boy; I hate to do it, but somehow I must break through this wall around him. He must cast out this inferiority psychosis if he is to recover to normal living."

He said "Soldier, we are not going to pamper you any more, or carry you around. You have got to be awakened, boy. We can do nothing for you until you open that mind of yours. We all feel sorry about that leg, but other men have lost legs in battle and they have carried on with good spirit. Besides, a man can live and be happy and have a successful career without a leg or an arm or an eye."

This talk did not move the boy in the slightest. Finally, after

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many days of attempting to open the closed mind of his patient the doctor quite unconsciously did a peculiar thing, something which amazed even himself.

The doctor was not a particularly religious person . . . and had seldom, if ever, mentioned religion in his practice. However, this day in sheer desperation the doctor literally shouted at the boy, "All right, all right; if you won't let any of us help you—if you are so stubborn that you won't even help yourself—then, then—why don't you let God help you? Get up and get that leg on; you know how to do it."

With this he left the room.

A few hours later it was reported that the boy was up, had on his artificial leg, and was moving around. The doctor said that one of the most thrilling moments in his medical experience came some days later when he saw this boy walking around the grounds with a girl friend.

Later when the soldier was discharged from the hospital he came in to see the doctor. The physician started to give him some suggestion, but the boy said, "It's all right, Doc; I remember the medicine you gave me that day. And I think with that prescription I can get along well enough."

"What prescription?" asked the doctor.

"Don't you remember the day you told me that if I could not do it myself, to let God help me? Well, that did something to me. I felt sort of different inside, and as I thought about it, it began to come over me that maybe I could do it—that maybe I wasn't finished after all."<sup>1</sup>

Once again the ancient word had worked its miracle. "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." "If ye have faith"—faith in yourself because you have faith in God.

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted with permission of publishers from *A Guide to Confident Living* by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. Copyright, 1948, by Prentice-Hall, Inc., 70 Fifth Avenue, New York 11, New York.

## III

There remains, then, only one further thing to be said: It is our business to nurture faith, and the food of faith is prayer.

This is a fact which you get when you read between the lines of Matthew's story. You recall the background of the mustard-seed teaching. Our Lord had just come down with Peter and James and John from the Mount of Transfiguration. As they walked up to the crowd, a man stepped out and knelt before Jesus. He said he had a son who was ill, and that he had taken him to the disciples, who could not heal him. At a word from Jesus the demon left the boy and he was cured instantly.

When the crowd left, the disciples asked Jesus why they had failed; and he answered, "Because of your little faith" (A.S.V.). And he went on to tell them that faith as small as a mustard seed can remove a mountain. Then there follows a verse which says: "This kind goeth not out but by prayer."

The point of the whole passage is the mighty power of faith and the large need for faith; and the point of this puzzling verse is that prayer is the food of faith, which finds its nurture in communion with God.

Some years ago there lived in London a man named Quintin Hogg, who spent much of his time in reclaiming the lives of boys of the street. One of these lads was Jem Nicholls, and after Mr. Hogg's death he was asked one day how the fight for character was coming on. This is what he said: "I have a bit of trouble in keeping straight, but I thank God all is well. You see, I carry a photo of 'Q. H.' with me always, and whenever I am tempted I take it out and his look is a wonderful help, and by the grace of God I am able to overcome all." It is said of Napoleon that before a great battle he would stand alone in his tent, and one by one the marshals and commanders of his armies would enter, grasp his hand in silence,

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and go out again, fired with a new courage. So is prayer the wellspring of faith. Power comes from the Presence, and the way to power is the practice of the Presence.

So, then, if you desire that faith which can remove mountains, that faith in yourself which comes from faith in God, you can nurture it into life in those moments when you practice the presence of God. Tonight when you say your prayers, stop long enough to take your mind off yourself and center your thought on God. Take the word of the Apostle and make it your prayer: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Say it over a dozen times, if need be, until you get the feel of it. I can because God can, and because he will make me able. Tomorrow morning when you wake up, before you begin to think of all the mountains you have to move during the day, come back once again to the Apostle and let him give you this word: "If God be for us, who can be against us." Say these words ten times, until the meaning of them begins to sink into your mind. Then during the day, whenever you have a few seconds while waiting for a red light to turn green, or while the clerk is serving the customer ahead of you, or while standing in line in the cafeteria, say to yourself something like this: "God is with me; God is helping me; God is guiding me; 'My God shall supply all [my] need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.'"

This is prayer, and prayer will feed faith, and "if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

## XIV

# *Restoring Faith*

“He restoreth my soul.”

—PSALM 23:3

The Twenty-Third Psalm has been called the “nightingale of the psalms.” If its verses had tongues and could tell the story of their ministry down through the ages, their biographies would be gathered from the four corners of the earth.

This psalm has a single theme, presented in two pictures. In the first, God is Shepherd and we are sheep. In the heat of the midday sun, almost unbearable in that little land of Palestine, the shepherd leads his sheep into a shady glen where the grass is green and the water is cool; and there they find rest and refreshment. Then the picture changes. God becomes Host and we are guests. He prepares a table before us, and from his bounty our hunger is fed. The two pictures are tied together by the words: “He restoreth my soul.” Whether as Shepherd or as Host, God is providing food and drink—is restoring our souls.

### I

Let us get into the truth of it by noting that what people need today as much as anything else is a restoring faith. The psalmist speaks of your soul; but this means you, your spirit, your life. And he speaks of restoring your soul; this means

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winding you up when you run down, building you up inside, giving you new life. When you put it like that, everywhere you look you can see the need of such a faith.

For example, not long ago the state convention of a group of doctors known as neuropsychiatrists was held in our city. It was interesting to notice the names of some of the topics they discussed. The first paper was on "Grief Reactions." The doctors are having to learn how to deal with people who go to pieces when sorrow strikes. The second paper was titled "Alcoholic Rehabilitation." The doctors are saying that they cannot help the patient until they go behind this problem to see why he feels the need of leaning on an artificial stimulant. A third paper was called "Marital Troubles and Mental Disorders." They said that some of their patients come to the hospitals because they do not possess the inner stamina to meet the normal stresses which develop between husbands and wives.

Last summer I read a book called *Living Wisely and Well*.<sup>1</sup> One of its authors is a doctor named Appel, and it is a modern commentary on this verse from the Twenty-Third Psalm.

Did you know, for example, that there are over 600,000 persons in mental hospitals in the United States, and that the rate is increasing by 200,000 a year? This means, says Dr. Appel, that over 1,000,000 persons now living will find themselves in mental hospitals within the next five years; and that mental illness is a bigger problem than cancer, tuberculosis, and infantile paralysis combined; and that 14,000,000 people in the United States will suffer a serious nervous breakdown sometime in their lives. This brings it down to one person in thirteen and one family in five.

Did you know that 38 per cent of those called for military service are rejected for this reason, and 50 per cent of those discharged are discharged for the same cause? Did you know that there are 100,000 attempted suicides in this country

<sup>1</sup> W. B. Terhune, Appel, Thom, and Overholser.

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annually, and 3,000,000 citizens disabled by alcoholism? "That means," says this doctor, "that the strain of American life is so great that this number of persons cannot meet it without destroying themselves, either totally or partially."

And then he speaks of the matter of broken homes. He says:

The present divorce rate has reached the staggering figure of one in four marriages. This means that two in eight people in our population who seriously believed that they wanted to live together are so constituted, or so conditioned, that they cannot get along with each other, cannot make the adjustments necessary to live together; that they have to renounce goals they had seriously aspired to, reverse themselves and separate.

The whole thing, you see, is a commentary on our verse. Whether you are dealing with the problem of crowded hospitals or the high rate of military-service rejectees, whether you are thinking of drink or divorce or delinquency, or whether you are one of that much larger number who have not reached one of these crises but who feel so often on the verge of going to pieces—it all goes back to this need of having our souls restored.

## II

Now move on and notice, in the second place, that the psalmist points us to the true source of help. What he says is this: "The Lord is my shepherd; . . . he restoreth my soul." In other words, God is the answer to our problem, and what we need is more faith.

Of course that sounds exactly like what you would expect a preacher to say, and you will tend to discount it as just a little ministerial sales talk. Yet the strange fact is that more and more doctors are saying the same thing. It is worth noticing that the first speaker before that convention of doctors was a minister. It is worth noticing too that it is becoming more and more customary for hospitals to place

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ministers on their staffs as chaplains. Every minister I know who is alert to the needs of people, and who is aware of the resources of faith, has had more than one patient referred to him by the patient's doctor.

This is one thing which makes this business of being a minister so fascinating and so rewarding. Of course a lot of time must be spent in preparing sermons, and I suppose we must have sermons. Yet they are the least satisfying part of it. The Chinese have a saying to the effect that a sermon is like dropping eye medicine out of a tenth-story window: you never know whether it hits or not. But to sit down in a conference room where you can come face to face with a need and help a person to plug in on the power of God to meet the need—it is there that the real work is done. I have heard Harry Emerson Fosdick say that he always judged the effectiveness of a sermon by the number of people who came to him afterward.

If you could listen in on a minister's conference room or read the mail which comes over his desk, you would realize how hungry are the souls of people and how at last they are driven to seek the help which only God can give. Here is a man who writes from a hospital: "For the last fifteen years I have had a problem of drink and now it has got the best of me and I realize I must seek help. I wish you would remember me in your talks with God, and when I get back home I am going to stick closer to the church and to AA."

Even a blind man can see the connection between the large number of people who consider it smart to ignore God and to pass up the church, and the 200,000 new patients in mental hospitals every year. You just can't get around it: the laws of God are the laws of health, mental health, moral health, physical and spiritual health. It is not a good sign when a family altar is discarded in a home and in its place there is installed a bar for serving drinks. What is going to happen to the children growing up in that home? Later on when the

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time comes that they need God, will they know how to find him or will they be forced to fall back on a broken reed? It is serious business, and something we ought to think about.

Somewhere I read a story about two men who went out to climb a mountain. One was an expert guide who knew the place well, and the other a man who had never been there before. When they reached a dangerous precipice where the wind always blew with cyclone force, the guide got down on his knees and crawled. Looking back, he saw his friend still trying to make it on his feet. In the face of the heavy wind which he knew would blow the fellow off any minute, he yelled back to him: "On your knees, man, on your knees; you're never safe up here unless you're on your knees."

The pace of living has been stepped up to such a point, and the problem of competition in business and of keeping up with the Joneses at home has added so much to the strain, that we are all the more ready to get up with a pickup and to lie down with a sleeping pill. But any man of real intelligence will hear life saying to him something like this: "On your knees, man, on your knees; you're not safe anywhere today unless you know how to begin and to end the day on your knees."

### III

But of course it is necessary to say a third thing. You have been told times without number that what you need is the power of God, and you have tried to find it and have failed because, as our Lord put it, "ye ask amiss." We must not stop short of trying to get hold of what the psalmist has to give us in the way of directions for this restoring faith.

The first is a conviction. It is a conviction that God *is*, and that he is your God, and that his power is available to you. "The Lord is my shepherd," says the psalmist, and because he is my shepherd, "I shall not want." Do you believe that the power of God is available to you, and that the solu-

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tion which you are seeking to your problem is in line with the will of God, and that God is waiting and wanting to help you? If you can say, "The Lord is my shepherd, therefore I have no lack," then you are ready to begin.

The second step in this program is somehow to achieve a quiet mind. The reason this is necessary is that nervous tension blocks the power of God, and the only way to be released from tension is to give your mind a chance to grow quiet and become relaxed.

This must be the reason our Lord said that when we pray we are to go into a room and close the door. We have to have privacy, and of course this is hard. One woman said the only way she could get privacy was by throwing her apron over her head.

A taxicab company in Ohio tells how another woman found it. A driver answered a call one day, and a mother came out of the house with three small children. The youngest looked like he was about three months old. The lady put them into the cab and said to the driver, "Pull the meter, please, and I'll be back in a few minutes."

The driver did as he was told. He sat there waiting, while the children bawled and yelled as three small children will. Fifteen minutes later their mother came back.

"How much do I owe you?" she asked.

"Aren't you going any place?" the man wanted to know.

"No," said the lady, 'I had a long-distance phone call to make and needed peace and quiet. Here's the fare, and thanks for waiting."

Prayer is like this. It is making a long-distance call, and you have to have peace and quiet. In order to find that, one man I know stops by the church on his way to work every morning. Another man gets to his office thirty minutes ahead of the others and makes an altar of his desk. If you can't do this, you can take time out anywhere you are and follow the psalmist.

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Say to yourself: "He is making me to lie down in green pastures." And as you say it, see yourself lying down in some green spot, as you did many a time on a lazy summer afternoon where you were a child. It is interesting that God and the doctors and the artists tell us the same thing. God tells us to lie down in green pastures; and the doctors say that lying down is the best posture for releasing tension; while the artists tell us that green is the most relaxing color there is. So you can see yourself lying down in green pastures.

And then: "He is leading me beside the still waters." No matter how busy you are; no matter how heavy the pressure is; no matter how frantic you feel in the face of all the things you have to do—you can always stop just a moment and close your eyes and see yourself sitting beside a quiet lake and say to yourself, "He is leading me beside still waters." This is a little game I play with myself every day. I stop long enough to see myself sitting on the shore of a beautiful lake near the golf course at Black Mountain, North Carolina. A sense of stillness steals over my spirit, and I begin to feel something of the strength of the Blue Ridge hills which are mirrored in the lake. It is the strength of God we are after; and before ever a body of water can catch a reflection, it must be still. "He leadeth me beside the still waters."

First, a conviction; next, a quiet mind; and finally, the prayer of affirmation.

I went one day to a home where a wife who had suddenly become a widow was overwhelmed in a veritable paroxysm of grief, her body shaking with her sobs. It would do no good to talk to her, because speech would be only so much noise; so I suggested that we pray together. For some reason I was led to pray in the words of the Twenty-Third Psalm. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul." As I went on, I noticed that the breathing became easier and the sobs less audible. By the time I

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finished with, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord," and said, "Amen," and looked up, our friend was asleep; and sleep is what she needed most at the time. Within the thirty-nine seconds that it takes to say this psalm, here was a person who was changed from the convulsion of sorrow to the rest which was needed.

For a while I wondered at the power of God thus to work a miracle, and then one day I discovered what I believe to be the explanation. It is the power God can give through the prayer of affirmation. It is a law of our natures that what gets your attention gets you, and this is why some of our prayers do us positive harm. If you talk to God about being sick, and thus hold your illness in the center of your attention instead of affirming that the health of God is yours, you will make yourself sicker. By the same token, if you will take some of the great words of the Bible about the power of God to make you strong, and put them in the center of your attention by affirming them—that is, saying them over to yourself again and again—you will find them coming true. It is this truth which this psalmist gives us. He does not say, "I wish the Lord were my shepherd"; he says, "The Lord is my shepherd." He does not say, "I wish he would restore my soul"; he says, "He restoreth my soul." This truth is not some trick which you can laugh off. It is a lesson in prayer given by our Lord himself. "Whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." (A.S.V.)

So, then, if you want the power that restores your soul, you can have it. First, believe it is available; second, induce within yourself the relaxed receptivity of a quiet mind; and third, go through your Bible and build yourself an alphabet of affirmations on which you can feed your soul just as you feed your body.

A radio listener in California wrote to let me know about her experience. She had grown up in a church but had never

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found much help from attending the services. Then one day she wandered into a meeting where the speaker counseled his listeners to make a habit of saying the Twenty-Third Psalm several times a day, every day. She had followed the practice and had received such inner strength that she was amazed. Then she closed with this sentence: "Why don't our regular churches tell their people how they can get hold of the power of God?"

Well, the psalmist tells us how. If you will learn his secret of faith and practice it, you too can know his power.

## *Sustaining Faith*

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, . . . that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand.”

—EPHESIANS 6:10-13

On the shelves in my library is a book by a London preacher named Frederick A. Atkins. The book is titled *Standing Up to Life*, and that phrase describes the kind of faith multitudes need. It is sustaining faith—faith that helps you stand up to life.

The reason so many people are unable to stand up to life is that they seek to stand in a strength which is only weakness. What we need is a faith which can teach us to be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of *his* might.” Such a faith provides three gifts which no money can buy, no college diploma can confer, and no scientific know-how can guarantee.

### I

For one thing, such a faith helps us stand, because it gives us something to stand on. It gives us something to stand on by providing a way of looking at things which puts meaning into life—into your life.

## SUSTAINING FAITH

One night the Hebrew poet walked outdoors and looked up into the Syrian sky. What he said about what he saw we have never forgotten: "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! . . . When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him?" Well, what about it? What is man, and the meaning of his life?

In 1926 a chemist decided he would analyze the human body to find out its commercial value. An average man, five feet ten inches tall, weighing 160 pounds, contains "enough fat to make seven bars of soap; enough iron to make a nail of medium size; enough sugar to fill a shaker; enough lime to whitewash a chicken coop; enough phosphorus to make 2,200 match heads; enough magnesium for a dose of magnesia; enough potassium to explode a toy cannon, together with a little sulphur." All of which, in that year, had a sales value of ninety-eight cents!

But is that what you are? I don't know how you feel about it, but I do not want anybody telling me that I am nothing but a chemical compound. And so I go back and say to my Lord, "What about it, Lord. Am I nothing more than a chemical compound?" And he makes answer: "You're dust, all right; but there's deity mixed in with your dust. You are made in the image of God; you can be filled with the Spirit of God; and you are placed upon this earth to do the will of God." And that makes a difference.

As someone has well remarked, you would never think of walking up to a crocodile and patting him on the back and saying, "Be a crocodile, old fellow, be a crocodile." He would turn and stare at you with uncomprehending gaze and go on being a crocodile because he could not do anything else. That would be foolish. Yet it is not foolish to go in a time of testing to one of your friends who needs encouragement if he is to

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take the high road, and say to him, "Be a man, old fellow, be a man." He might succeed in being a man, and he might not. It all depends upon what he thinks of himself.

Suppose you are on your way home some night, tired to the bone from the day's work, and sick to the teeth of the monotonous round of this meaningless treadmill. Your very fatigue cries out for the stimulus of some sensuous thrill. Then a voice sounds in your ear, Be a man, old fellow, be a man! But who are you? A chemical compound worth ninety-eight cents? If that's all you are, then why not answer the call of the siren, why not have your fling, why not drown your sorrows? If you are dust and only dust, why not eat, drink, and be merry?

Yes, but what if being a man looks beyond dust to deity? What if being a man has something to do with the image of God? What if being a man means being God's man? If you think you're an animal, you will live like an animal—eating, drinking, mating. Yet if you think you're a child of God, then let someone touch you on the shoulder and say, Be a man, old fellow, be a man! Then you will look up and see that the true man is the Man Christ Jesus; and with your eyes fixed upon him, you will plant your feet in the upward path and begin again to climb!

They tell us that an old Edinburgh weaver used to pray every night: "O God, help me to hold a high opinion of myself." You will not be successful long in standing up to life unless you have this high opinion of yourself to stand on. And I know not where you will get it outside of this Christian faith of ours.

But we need a faith that will give us something to stand on in facing not only our individual lives but also life in the large. What about history? The escalator view of events is no longer valid. We used to think that our world was going always and only upward, but now we know better. The

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theory of automatic progress is out of date, and the only evolution which our generation knows is revolution. How can a man read the headlines in his morning paper and keep from losing his sanity?

There is a sense, you see, in which our security as individuals is involved in what interpretation we place upon the ongoing of the human process. When one looks at our world today, it is not difficult to become the kind of pessimist who will, as one of our so-called wise men advised, "chuck it all" as soon as possible. But our faith can enable us to stand up to life even in the face of such contradiction of our hopes, because it gives us something to stand on.

One day in New York a man boarded a double-decker bus. He was pretty well in his cups, and his tongue was loose at both ends. He took his seat by the driver and talked incessantly. The driver soon grew weary and suggested that the passenger go to the upper deck. "There is fresh air up there and the view is wonderful." The man went up but stayed only a few minutes. Soon he came back and resumed his seat and his conversation.

"What's the matter," said the driver; "didn't you like it up there?"

"No," said the man; "it's not safe—there's no driver up there."

The Christian faith tells us that there is a Driver up there. A God whom we have been taught to call "Father" is sovereign in this universe, and history is "his story." As long as you can believe that the events which you see taking place on the world stage are but the gradual unfolding of a divine purpose which in the end will get itself worked out, you've got something to stand on. If God be at the helm, then no one can rock the boat. "I had fainted," said the psalmist, "unless I had believed." We can believe if we have faith in divine sovereignty, and so we have something to stand on.

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### II

Go on to note, in the second place, that a Christian faith helps us stand up to life because it gives us something to stand for.

Look at this picture. It is presented in a letter which the editor of a magazine received from a young girl.

Dear Sir,

I drink; I gamble; I go out with men. My parents do not know I do these things, or at least do not seem to know; but are parents deaf and blind? Understand, I'm not out with a tough crowd; just the boys and girls of the best families I was brought up with. What bothers me is all the older folks having faith in us, and these preachers standing round telling us how fine and good we are. Next time I go on a party, I think I'll kidnap a preacher and take him along. Maybe his next sermon would be about sin. And that is what we need. Did my mother do these things when she was a girl? Did my older sister? If I keep on doing these things, will I go to heaven or will I go to hell? Please write something to quiet my mind or I shall certainly go mad.<sup>1</sup>

Here is a girl who has nothing to stand for; and unless she finds something quickly, the chances are she will not stand. She will, as she says. "Certainly go mad."

But look at this other picture. After the war a soldier came home from Europe. One day soon after his return his father called him to the library.

"Son," he said, "I've been reading about what went on between American soldiers and German girls in the name of fraternization and I've got to know: Did you follow the crowd?"

<sup>1</sup> Edgar G. Gammon in *Christian Observer*. Used by permission of the author and the publishers.

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"Of course not, Dad," answered the boy. "Don't you know there are some things men with our name can be trusted not to do?"

It makes a difference in standing up to life if we have something to stand for—an ideal, a code, a pattern, a blueprint. The person who has no moral ideas or ideals, who is victimized by the current confusion as to what is right and wrong, will have difficulty holding his footing. But he who has gone all out for Christ, who has taken this Jesus as the touchstone of the good life, will be able to stand, because he has something to stand for. There are some things which he who bears the name Christian can be trusted not to do.

Something to stand for—in personal life and in cosmic life too. We were having an open forum during Religious Emphasis Week at Mary Baldwin College in Virginia. It was during World War II, and inevitably the talk turned in that direction. One girl spoke up and said, "Do you think this war is worth all it costs?" She then pictured the tremendous waste in money and materials and men; and as she talked, I could not escape the suspicion that the question was more than an academic one with her, that somewhere in Uncle Sam's army there was a soldier in Khaki who was all the world to her. Suppose something should happen to him? Naturally she wondered.

It happened that when she raised her question, I had in my pocket a copy of a letter which a minister in New York had received not long before. It went like this:

Dear Sir,

I'm a sailor, and I'll be pulling out in a few hours. I came into your place this morning lonely as I could be and scared to death about sailing again. I wanted to talk to somebody pretty bad, and there was a girl there who said hello to me. She said for me to sit down and we got to talking about the future. I said

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maybe there wouldn't be any for me. If only a fellow could be sure, I said, that something would come through worth dying for, it wouldn't be so bad.

And then she said the queerest thing. She smiled and said, "That's easy. Christ is coming through, and he's worth dying for." I looked at her, and she kept talking as if he was alive, and a good pal of hers. I sort of expected to see him walk in the door, it was so real.

I was only there about ten minutes; and I don't know why, but her talking to me like that sort of did something to me, and I'm not lonely anymore, and I'm not scared.

When I read that to my friend, she said, "Well, I suppose that answers my question, all right." Our faith provides a security which enables us to stand in the face of the awful price which wars exact, because it gives us something to stand for—the hope that, in some way, the code of the jungle will give way to the code of Jesus.

### III

We have said that a Christian faith helps us stand up to life because it gives us something to stand on and something to stand for. Go on to note, in the third place, that it gives us also Someone to stand by us.

It is well enough to have something to stand on, something which enables us to say with Stevenson, "I believe in an ultimate decency of things—aye, and if I woke in hell, should still believe it." It is well enough to have something to stand for—something which, though the heavens fall, will be right and will go on forever being right. But in standing up to life it is worth more than all else to have Someone to stand by—Someone who, when our morale begins to crack because we lose faith in ourselves and our ideals, can reach

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out a steady hand and speak an encouraging word. And, thank God, that too belongs to this faith of ours. The psalmist found it out long years ago: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for *thou art with me.*"

Billy Hicks was a petty officer in the British navy. He was promoted to be captain of the foretop. It was a dangerous post, and Billy knew it. The two men who had preceded him had fallen to their deaths. Billy had the superstition of the sea; and, being the third man, he turned pale when he learned he was to be next.

On the night before he began his new duties, he was seen working with the electric signal apparatus, as if sending an urgent message. The next day when the order came, Billy went aloft like a cat and came down safely. He seemed changed somehow, but no one knew why.

The reason came out when an officer of a near-by vessel was a guest on board. The officer asked if there was a man named Hicks on the boat. Told that there was, he said he had noticed the signal a few nights before and asked his signal officer to take down the message. Here is what it said:

God, this is Billy Hicks speaking. I ain't afraid of no bloomin' man or devil. I ain't afraid of no Davy Jones neither. I ain't like a bawlin' baby afussin' at its daddy for sweeties. I don't ask for no favors but jest one. This is it: when I strike the foretop tomorrow let it be with the courage of a man what is clean. And, O God, if it's jest the same with you, from this day on give me the feelin' I used to have long ago when I knelt at my mother's knee and said, "Our Father." Goodnight, God.

All of us need a way of looking at things that will give us something to stand on. All of us need an ideal of conduct that will give us something to stand for. All of us need an

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interior companionship that will give us Someone to stand by. Add up these needs—a philosophy of life, an ethic for life, and a power behind life—and what they come to is this: the name of One who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” All that you need you have in him.

If you know him, well and good. If you do not know him, I beseech you by the mercies of God, take him and make him your Friend and put your whole faith in him, and you will then be “strong in the Lord” and able to stand up to life.